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MIRIAM COPLEY.

BY

J. CORDY JEAFFRESON.

AUTHOR OF

“NOVELS AND NOVELISTS,” “CREWE RISE,”

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MIRIAM COPLEY.

TO MY READERS,—

DOUBTLESS every reader of this work, either at the outset, before commencing the first chapter, or during his progress through my confessions and reminiscences, or at the end, while passing judgment on the selfishness, vain-glory, vindictiveness, and general moral turpitude of my nature, will inquire what my *object* is in publishing revelations so painful, and, in many instances, so little to my credit. Such a question will

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be put solely for the sake of information—when is a question asked for any other purpose?—and such curiosity will be laudable,—curiosity, I believe, always is. It is therefore only meet and proper in me to spare my friends the trouble of searching out a sufficient motive to account for my conduct, and to save them from the danger and temptation of attributing a mean one to me. We all of us have an object in view whenever we act. In this generous and uncalculating age we never perfect a thought, or take a step, or stir our bodies, without having our eyes strained towards an end—and our ends, as our consciences can attest, are invariably noble and praiseworthy.

But, unfortunately for the curious, I cannot in the most secret recess of my heart—and of course in that sacred apartment it is impossible for chicanery, or self-deception, or humbug of any kind to find place—detect

any passion or sentiment, grand or disreputable, which I can honestly point to as a sole or contributory cause of my singular behaviour. It is not for distinction that I write, for notoriety is the atmosphere that I have breathed for more than a quarter of a century, and am so sick of that I would gladly exchange my lot for the monotonous experiences of a country rector's wife. It is not for fame and praise—why should I want them, since I have bought them daily, for many a year, with dinners, and guineas, and smiles? It is not for the sake of contradicting the prejudices, and disturbing the self-love of my weaker companions in the great wide-world madhouse,—why should I want to annoy them, *poor things?* *they* never did me a kindness! Neither do I publish for money—artists never do;—or for love—I have outlived it in myself and all care for it in others;—or from caprice—as an English gentlewoman, I

am above it. I don't want to elevate my kind, for the human race appears to me quite good enough ; and, now that so much has been done for it in the way of slave emancipation, peace societies, model lodging-houses, education, free-trade, and reform bills, I, for one, am of opinion that everything has been done which it was ever possible to do, and that nothing will make it better. On the other hand, I do not aim at degrading my fellow-creatures, or rendering them in any way more wretched than they are at present, as the result of a long and careful observation of them, in all ranks and shades of condition, is a firm conviction that it is beyond human power to add to their wretchedness.

I have written, and I now publish, for the simple reason that I have been, and am, powerless over myself, and merely obeying a steady, unvarying, irresistible, obscurely-shrouded impulse. It has not given me either

pleasure or ease to write, and to publish affords me no satisfaction ; as my pen has traced the lines, I have endured some of the sharpest anguish that has visited my chequered life, and it is without one sensation of joy or hope that I give my work to the world. I know well what I lay myself open to by this last step—the censures, the compassion, the scandal ! I shall be condemned,—there are so many good people who will feel a *duty* to condemn. I shall be pitied,—commiseration is so plentiful and mercy so fashionable. Then, too, the delicacy, and refinement, and æsthetic sensibility, which will feel themselves attacked, and will respond in their various delicate, and refined, and altogether exemplary strains ! How severe will wives, whose husbands are neither mad nor felons, be on me ! And how sternly will murder be judged by gentle creatures who are too good Christians to love their children better than their own

souls! But it matters not. Let the storm come. At least, the book that now leaves my keeping has been written—I will not say *honestly*, for that word has grown to mean so many things that it now signifies nothing—has been written to the best of my ability, and contains no lies.

CHAPTER I.

MY ENTRANCE INTO LIFE.

I AM ignorant of the date of my birth, although to set a proper example to my sex, I invented one for publication some years since in De Brett's Dictionary of the Peerage ; —and if I knew it, I would not honour its anniversary with any expression of joy, for it brought death and shame to her who bore me, sorrow to the honest clown who begot me, and to me a lot in which happiness has by no

means outweighed trouble and pain. It was well done by those ancients who uttered cries of lamentation when a child was born, and it would give me no slight solace to be able to feel that they were equally wise in giving way to gladness, whenever a child of man was removed from this earth of sin and disappointment.

But there was one day I remember well, and to which I look back with sensations of the profoundest awe, that was the gateway through which I passed from oblivious childhood into a life of vivid self-consciousness, strange experiences, and startling vicissitudes. This day I have in my inner life—with which no human creature, save one who has long since been in the grave, has meddled—always regarded as that of my nativity. It was the 28th day September, in a year now full forty years since. Of it, and the events that immediately followed it, I will proceed to speak, and

if in some respects I am prolix and tedious in this part of my narrative, I must sue for pardon on the ground that, firstly, it is necessary for all who would become acquainted with my character to have a distinct knowledge of certain early occurrences, that contributed in no ordinary degree to its formation — and, secondly, that so mysterious and powerful an influence has the memory of this day and its consequences had on me, that every petty incident and minutest recollection of alarm and suspicion connected with it, I am compelled to regard as of grave importance.

It was my daily pleasure and duty to feed the hogs in the swine-yard entrusted to my father's care. The piggery was an establishment of considerable dimensions, and contained at times not less than a hundred inmates. The crazy sheds, with faggot walls and straw roofs, of which it was composed, stood midway up the side of a stiff clay hill that com-

manded a wide and noble prospect of well-cultivated farms and rich woodland. But though from this exalted situation three villages were within sight, and, to all appearance, within hail, it was remote from the habitations of man. The nearest cottage to my father's was a mile and a-half distant, and the road leading past the piggery from Ufford on the one side of the hill to Loudham on the other was little frequented, and in wet seasons was almost impassable to any carriages except those used for agricultural purposes. Between the hog-yard and this road lay a small and somewhat neglected garden, which surrounded the wretched clay cabin in which I first saw the light, and had lived up to this 28th of September.

My father was not the proprietor of the swine or the buildings. He, poor man, was nothing more than the hard-worked, ill-paid, insulted drudge of one Joel Haggart, of whom

I shall soon have to make particular mention, and with a few of whose amiable characteristics the reader will become acquainted.

It required a good deal of exertion and adroit management of my physical powers to convey from the swill-tubs the appointed quantity of food to my eager and riotous family of grunTERS. I was small—not *for* my age, but *from* it, for I could have been but little more than twelve years old; and ere I could get a ladleful of the nauseous culsh, I had to mount a high stool placed by the side of the tubs, and then, ere I could put it into my pail, I had to dismount from the high stool, which eminence had to be ascended again for each separate ladleful; and when the pail was filled, and had been conveyed with much toil to the spot where the pigs were assembled ready to devour it, I had to mount another stool ere I could pour it over the wall of the sties down into the troughs. This

toil, unfit as it may appear for a child, was to me a real enjoyment; the intense pride with which I listened to my father's announcement that he committed to me the proper discharge of this part of his work, and the gratitude with which I witnessed him put up the long stools of clumsy shape, so that I should be enabled to be of some real use to the world of which I was an insignificant member, were the strongest emotions I ever felt previous to my memorable 28th of September.

On the occasion, however, of the morning of this day, everything went well, and I completed my task in a shorter time than usual. I had given the light wash to the young pigs, the grains, and bones, and heavy roots of vegetables to those somewhat their seniors, and peas, or barley-meal mixed with water, to those that were being fatted (according as their flesh was destined for the tables of the

wealthier or the poorer of Joel Haggart's customers), and yet it wanted some few minutes of seven o'clock. I stayed, therefore, a short time, looking at my happy charge. Either those pigs were strangely like human creatures, or I was strangely like a pig; for they and I had a perfect and mutual understanding of all we wished for and thought about; I talked to them, they grunted to me; and very much they resembled men in their fashion of herding together, amiably enough during their indolent and sleepy moments, and of rising eagerly and rushing forth with clamour, each for himself and every one against his neighbour, on any booty of food that was presented to their appetites. Possibly many of my readers think my old office of swine-tending a very humble and even ignominious one; but I have never reflected upon it with any sense of humiliation, or blushed to mention it in the society of nobles

and princes. It was necessary that the work should be done, and proudly can I say that it was always done well by me; and as for the lowliness of its character, what more do rulers and great ministers of state spend the glory of their days and the vigour of their intellects in accomplishing? Do they not perpetually, if they are true and honest men, weary and vex their brains only to feed in the best, and at the same time cheapest, way, innumerable herds of animals that are merely swine in nature, though not in name? The time indeed was, when kings and earthly lords strove to protect and advance the welfare of their subject's *souls*, and made sacred war on all that threatened jeopardy to their eternal salvation; but now, thank God! we have grown wiser, and in the government of men the one grand end in view is to produce and fatten *bodies*.

I did not turn from the pig-yard with any

such reflections as the foregoing, and yet, God knows, I was very sad at heart. As I passed by and looked in at two empty sties, that had only the day before been vacated by a pair of enormous hogs ready for the butcher's knife, a sense of having lost two old friends, and of the possibility of being bereft of more, took possession of me, and a sudden waft of melancholy robbed me of my accustomed cheerfulness. Immediately I conceived a disgust for my occupation; it was vain and profitless, leading to nothing—but disappointment.

I walked up the narrow path of the untidy garden, went straight through our cottage into what was called the front yard, and having advanced to within six paces of the road, paused before a shaggy, middle-aged man, who stood leaning against the garden gate. He was dressed in the ordinary costume of “a working man” (strange,

that in such a work-a-day world as this, working should be despicable)! greasy fustian coat, red neck-tie, patched corduroy breeches, very old leather gaiters, and hobnailed boots; he had no hat on his head, the dusty unkempt hair of which was sprinkled with dirty white; his face, thin and pale, was disfigured by three days' growth of beard, and his form was bowed by long toil and recent sickness.

"Little gori," said this ungainly individual, addressing me with rough tenderness of voice, but moving no external part of his body save his lips, "the gloom of the cloudy morning has come down on ye, and rests on your eyebrows, scowling like a black dog. Art well?—ay, thou art well. Art hungry?—no, say not ye're hungry yet, for we have emptied the locker o' its very dust, and shared the last morsel thegither this very morning an hour and more ago, and by the

mercy I hope to have in the next world, and ever have shown to dumb brutes i' this, I know not how to get another loaf this day unless the good woman, Susan Latchett, will stand me in my need about noon."

He spoke in the marked provincial dialect of one of our southern counties, but clearly and nervously.

"I am neither ill nor faint."

"Glad am I to hear ye, child. Were the last the matter wi' ye, I could not stay your hunger, save with the filth from the swill-pail, and even that it would be robbery for you to take, and so that honest God-fearing wof, Joel Haggart, would let you know if he caught you making the prodigal son's meal. But why art in the glums? Has thy work been too hard? and in toiling for thy sick father, have ye got a wring in the small of your slender back? Tell me, child, and speak out."

“I am not hurt, and there’s nought the matter with me,” I responded, sullenly.

The man’s brow darkened, and his eye flashed as he scanned me through impatiently. He was an irritable mortal, and a stern one; many a blow had I received from him, considerate and well-intentioned churl as he was, and now I, with reason, trembled, lest he should decide that a sound flogging was the best remedy for my dejection.

“Not hurt, child, you say—nor hungry, nor ill? Then the sore devil of thy corrupt temper is on you, and you are come to pester me with your sullen looks.”

I saw that the danger of his wrath breaking out yet more violently was imminent, and I determined to try the strength of a charm in my possession, which only a few days before had calmed him in a fit of passion. By accident, during play, I had discovered that addressing him by his name in a gentle

plaintive voice had a strong and softening influence over him. Now was a fine opportunity to test the power of the spell.

“Roger Copley,” I said, with sedate measured accents, throwing as much feeling as I could command into my words—“I meant no wrong; I would not grieve you for a single minute, and that you know right well; surely, though I am small and young, surely it is as pitiful a thing for me to be tearful and spirit-broken as it would be if I were older than you.”

The charm worked quicker than I had dared to hope. Roger Copley raised his hands from his sides; one he held up with a gesticulation of astonishment and entreaty, and with the other he drew me to him, saying:—

“Hist, child! ’Tis not thou who art speaking—who is it? who are you?”

“Roger Copley, I am your poor little

child. Don't treat me harshly. The sows in the swine-yard don't bite at their young till they are old and strong enough to resent it or get out of the way. I am yours, a part of you—you have often told me so; but what my body suffers yours doesn't feel, and the pain of my heart, too, is my own, and not yours."

For a few moments the poor clown clutched me with his horny hands, that trembled as if shaken with the palsy, and then, his knees giving way beneath him, he sunk down sobbing on the bank in which our garden fence grew.

Soon he grew more composed, and drawing me to him, kissed both my cheeks, and placed me on his knee.

"I should have thy pardon to beg, little Miriam," he said, mingling his broken sentences of rugged sarcasm and deep pathos with many grotesque expressions of con-

trition and reconciliation—"only I am thy parent, and 'tis impossible for a parent to stand in need of a child's pardon! How should a father sin towards his own offspring? He owes it no duty. The duty is all on the other side. Ought not a child to be grateful to him who gave it life, not to please *himself* in the least degree, but solely for the sake of *it*. You understand me? Oh, little woman, if e'er ye live to be the wife of an honest man, have consultation with the yet unborn, and make it a fair statement of what life really is, and make it give you an acknowledgment, writ out on parchment and duly signed in the presence of witnesses, that it yearns for life, bitter and sweet, ere you put your hand to it yourself, and do that which maybe you'll fain undo when it has become another's business—ere you put on the sinful earth, and under the light of the weary sun, a creature you can't gather back into nothingness as you called

him out o' it, and who perhaps will live to feel you cheated him of bliss when you gave him existence."

He thought he was altogether beyond my comprehension; but I was quite at home with his words and meaning. A feeling of the perplexing mystery life was, is, and ever will be, the excitement of longing to know the secrets of the still, deep sea of existence in which I floated, and a triumphant recognition of being able to act and think for myself (although my ideas of thought and action were extremely vague and confused) made the blood circulate in my heart, quick and warm, as it does in the breast of a child for the first time witnessing a melo-drama. At the same time, I deemed it prudent to hold my tongue, and to avoid responding to the best of my intelligence; for, in my cautious, calculating little brain, I judged that if my father detected my knowingness, he might be

startled and offended by it, and cease to be communicative. So I feigned stupidity. Was it with me the beginning of artifice? Heaven knows it was not the end.

“Heart o’ mine!” said the poor fellow, with great gentleness, after a pause, during which he had shifted his weak rheumatic limbs into an easier position, and with his coat-sleeve had removed from his eyes the dews of sorrow, “heart o’ mine, you bean’t afraid of me, and you know when my anger has passed fairly over me, it doesn’t return till another sun has risen. So take courage, and tell one, if ye can, what troubles you within. Speak in your ordinary voice for the most part—but—if you’d wind up your speaking now and then with ‘a Roger Copley’—musicked, as you did just now—you’d make your sick father glad, though the water might wet the lashes of his eyes.”

I was silent, for tremor, like that which

seizes a young man when he is called upon to make his first speech in public, prevented my utterance.

“Child! don’t vex yourself to tell me, if to do so grieve you,” gently put in my father. “Ye said truly; you’re a living creature distinct from me. And what right have I to pester you with questions, and to break into the quiet spots of your bosom? Your thoughts are your own; little else is the property you have besides them; and wherefore should I plunder you of your only treasures, only because there is no mortal above me to punish me for the wrong?”

This kindness gave me courage; and rapidly, but without confusion, I told my sire what had caused my unhappiness. Sympathy was not what I was accustomed to, and I was astonished by seeing how deeply he was moved by my simple and affecting words. He did not speak for two minutes, and then it

was only with a great effort that he gave expression to his thoughts.

“Little daughter, you’re a small wee thing, but there’s knowledge in ye, such as learned men who put their heads in wigs often lack. You did right in being sorry for the poor swine; they’re the best and gentlest friends you’ve known, and I question whether, apart from a lot of cunning and malice, which we call breath divine, human creatures have better understandings or more courage than they. And so, poor lassie, your old friends are gone, and the fear is on you, you may soon have to say good bye to others of your acquaintance; you didn’t say it in words, but I read in your great black eyes, that a cold shudder holds you that ere long you’ll look in your father’s crib, as you did just now in the fattening-sties, and find nothing of him there, but have to turn round and fight the world with your weak little arms. Don’t cry, at least not for me; it will

be better resting under the bank when my gibing tongue has left off fleering at friend and foe, than it is here, on the green grass, where I cannot say 'God love ye' even to the flowers, because, poor things, they do not suffer pain like me."

I cried bitterly, but, without checking me, he went on slowly and with increased solemnity of manner.

"And don't cry for yourself; there'll be more people to care for you when your old dad is gone, and go he will, for the strange tones of your voice have told me so; and the moonlight, as it slept yonder, down in the low meadows, last night, told me so; and the spirit within me—that is within all who are of a living sort—has told me so. I am not all clear as to whether there is a world ayont, but if there be, perhaps some of us will have a better chance in it than we have had here; and a worse one than the best here, I don't wish

even Joel Haggart. It would be hard indeed to have to keep hogs for him on the other side of the grave. But don't be downcast, little woman; dry thine eyes—they are sweet ones, bless them! How they shine! they'll help ye one fine day to make a living!"

"What mean you by 'to make a living?' "

I asked, still feigning ignorance.

"To get on, and grow richer and richer every day."

"To get richer is—to live; then, father, what is it to do as we have done—to get poorer and poorer?"

The anguish of that unhappy man's countenance, as I put this question with the simplicity natural to my years, I shall never forget. An ashy pallor came over his gaunt face, and for a few seconds his lips twitched convulsively, as if he were about to have a fit, but with manly exertion, the heroism of which I was little able to appreciate,

he compressed within himself the bitter tide of grief that had almost burst forth, and fondling me once again with feminine softness, diverted my thoughts from the melancholy subject on which they had fixed.

“Wait a little, my queen, and you’ll be old enough to serve a beautiful lady as her own maid.”

“That *will* be nice!” cried I, smiling and becoming genuinely happy at the proposition. It was no new idea to me, but the favourite romance—offspring of my father’s imagination and paternal pride—which had on many previous occasions given me a gust of pleasure.

“She’ll be very tall, with a bonny colour, and golden hair—sha’n’t she, father? When she goes abroad, she shall be dressed beautiful in silks, and a bonnet covered all over with feathers, and at home she shall play at pyanners and church-organs, and never wear

nothing less on her head than a crown of gold and diamonds? And there shall be a carriage and beautiful horses, and a footman and coachman, all over sky-blue and silver, and a maid to wait on me, and do whatever I don't wish to do myself? And then, when my charming young lady has fell in love, and married a lord, she'll give me hundreds of pounds, and I'll marry the steward or the richest farmer on the 'state, and have a finer house and more servants than any other farmer for miles round?"

My father smiled assent to all my questions; and when I paused, breathless with the excitement of so delicious a dream, he vowed that everything should be much grander than I had stated. My lady should be the daughter of a duke, her husband should be a marquis, and I should marry—not a farmer, but a general in the army, with a plume nodding over his head, a horse dancing

and prancing as if he wanted to jump over the sun.

He was still continuing to pour into my ears enhancing assurances of future triumph and distinction, when suddenly he lifted up his hand, and an expression came over his countenance that showed he was listening intently to some distant sounds.

“Hist! little one; don’t ye hear wheels coming from Loudham? Keep quiet till I know whose music it is.”

Concern and perplexity clouded his brow as he uttered the words and leaned forward in the direction of Loudham Rise. Soon it became evident that his ears had not deceived him; for as the seconds flitted past us, they brought nearer and nearer the ringing and grating of wheels, revolving at the rate of twelve miles an hour, and the clattering hoofs of a horse driven furiously over the rough hill-side. The noise was familiar to me; such was the

customary pace with which our master dashed about the country. And, had I been deaf, the murky gloom, becoming every instant deeper on Roger Copley's countenance, would have warned me that his tyrant was approaching.

Another minute, and Joel Haggart had checked his panting bay horse, and, having leapt from the cross-board of his cart, was standing before us.

CHAPTER II.

JOEL HAGGART AND HIS MAN.

I HAD entered upon life. During the brief space of time that I had spent on the garden-bank with my father, I had mastered one of the grand secrets of existence. A sense of my own personality had come upon me, and while detecting in myself an independent living creature, distinct and separate from all similar animals about me, fashioned by my Maker to act, think, and suffer in my own

way—and in none other—I had made a rapid and searching examination of all I saw or could remember of my poor father's experiences and character. My judgment of him was no cruel one. With all the fervour of a child's impetuous nature, my heart bounded and burned with love for him; and rarely, if ever, in my entire life, have I experienced such a sense of aversion, and contempt, and indignation for any mortal as I then felt for Joel Haggart. My very flesh crept with fear and hate as I saw him standing with his hands in his pockets, and surveying with an air of vulgar insolence the bowed and wasted form of his slave.

“Your rheumatics worse—of course?” were his first words of greeting; and the voice with which he uttered them proclaimed it as his opinion that rheumatism in another was a cruel insult to himself, which, as a man of honour, he was bound to resent.

Joel Haggart was a short, stout, athletic man. He certainly was not more than five feet and four inches in height, and of that altitude a singularly small proportion was given up to the neck. An enormous glutton, and an habitual drunkard, he would have fallen years before a victim to apoplexy, had it not been for his remarkable habits of bodily exertion, which converted all the beef and beer he swallowed into muscle that covered his unwieldy shoulders, and made his limbs miracles of weight and strength. What the man was, and what his history had been, it would be hard to say. Land-agent, horse-dealer, surveyor, jobber, farmer, public-house keeper, auctioneer!—by turns he had been, or called himself, all these over and over again. His reputation as an utter scoundrel was a proverb on the lips of the peasantry for miles round; at least half-a-dozen times he had been a fraudulent

bankrupt; in every direction one came upon a fresh proof of his violence and wickedness; in a wretched child clinging to an unwedded mother, in an honest family reduced to beggary through having received from him a trifling pecuniary accommodation, or in a community of smugglers or poachers that he had organized and was known to hold in his pay; and yet the fellow, infamous and hated as he was, held his own, and received an amount of patronage and support from his superiors that he would never have gained by honesty and useful toil. Many of the gentlemen of the county employed him to obtain information about the races of the district, to get up prize-fights, to spoil their neighbour's preserves, to negotiate sales of horses, to set about reports to the detriment, or the reverse, of the favourites for the next steeple-chase, to

depreciate the condition and character of a kennel of dogs they were desirous of purchasing, and to execute many other similar commissions requiring in their agent no ordinary store of judgment, delicacy, and honour. Even the graver of the neighbouring potentates afforded the fellow a degree of countenance and approval, giving him a greeting 'as he rattled his square cart past their carriages, and describing with manifest enjoyment to their friends his most audacious acts of knavery. It appeared to them in the light of an inspiring comedy, that a man, who so richly deserved suspension by the neck outside the county jail, should be well-fed, thriving, rich (as some maintained), at liberty to do as much harm as he liked, and all the while receiving a laughing "Good day to you" from nine out of every ten people he encountered.

"Thank you, Joel ' Haggart, for your

polite enquiries—my rheumatism is less painful this morning than usual ; but I am still weak.”

In making this reply to Haggart’s greeting, my father used a quick mocking tone of voice that gave peculiar force to his words.

“Ah, you *are* weak—very weak—about the weakest bit of human flesh that ever ate his master’s husks out of a swill-pail ! But, man, how can you expect to be otherwise, when you wont live generously, as I do ? Take a leaf out of my book, and improve your diet. Begin the day with a good pound and half of beef-steak, stewed or made into a pie, wash it down with a quart of ale, and pack it tight and easy with a bowl of bread-and-milk ; then go out and get an appetite for a good dinner of pork chops and sausages, after which meal sleep till supper time, when you make up for previous abstinence, and

then sheer off to bed and recruit your exhausted nervous energies."

"Well, Joel, I have not begun this day after your plan, for I and this brat of mine have shared about a pound of bread between us, and we have not an ounce of food left in our store."

Joel stroked each side of his fat, sleek, close-shorn face, passed his right hand over his thick low-browed head, surveyed the width and depth of the burly form that was encased in his velveteen jacket and corduroy trowsers, stuck his legs wide apart, wagged his pate to and fro, and then, with an indescribable expression of malicious enjoyment, gave loose to the playfulness of his nature.

"And why not have more food by you, Roger? This is unwise. You shouldn't be so fond of money. What good is there in keeping all that stock of golden sovereigns

which you have in the chest upstairs, when your belly is crying out for a slice of bread? Money is good only for what it'll bring; and if you are so perverse—I may say so obstinate, in opposing the merciful designs of providence—as not to let it fetch you what nature requires, you deserve pity no more than the Whatbury Plucky-one did last week when he dropped his guard and let the Mealy Pet bung his peepers, first right and then left, and send him reeking off the ground, groggy and piping. Take my advice, Roger Copley, and disperse a little of that superfluous succulating medium which you now hoard up to worship and adore like a golden calf, or Balaam's ass in the vision."

So tickled was Mr. Joel Haggart with the originality of his humour in charging my poor father with being a miser, and with undergoing slow starvation of his own free-will and choice, that he stroked his chin

repeatedly, winked with a lively appreciation of his own brilliance, chuckled, and looked round him as if he expected the hedge to send forth sounds applauding his facetiousness.

Rising from the ground where he had retained his reclining posture during Joel Haggart's frolicsome address, my father said :—

“ Miriam, run away and count the pigs ; I and Joel Haggart must have a few words with each other.”

My father never addressed me by my Christian name save when he desired especially to arouse my attention and secure my interest. On the present occasion, his manner of pronouncing my name told me plainly the motive he had for wishing me out of the way of hearing what passed. By himself, he could endure the gibes of his master, but he winced under the humiliation of having his child a

witness of the insults he was compelled to bear uncomplainingly.

I obeyed, and withdrew—down the path, through the cottage, and down to the hog-yard. But I could not rest there. My wonder and curiosity had been awakened by what I had heard, and the thirst of learning more overcame every other consideration. I would steal up on tip-toe behind the scant bushes that ran along one side of the garden, and listen to what passed between the two men.

“What! and you can’t pay a coin of this year’s rent? ’Tis a weekly holding, by fair bargain and compact, and not one blessed shilling have I seen of your money for twelve months. You lying, cheating, drunken rascal. I’ll sell you up. Your chairs, and table, and bedding will fetch enough to pay me my dues, and out you shall go—neck and crop.”

Such were the words that came from Joel

Haggart's lips when I took up my station behind the bushes.

“You may do what seems well to you, Joel Haggart. If I could, I would pay ye all I owe you; not for the sake of adding to your prosperity, but of keeping a covering over the head of the little child I just now sent away beyond the reach of your cruel words. But I have neither gold, nor the strength to earn it, nor power to steal it, and there is no charitable person nigh from whom I can beg any. I am a poor, decrepid, used-up man; but I work as hard as the little powers the Almighty has endowed me with will allow me. Do I not trudge miles a-day, the country round, collecting offal for your hogs? Has aught of yours suffered in my hands? Have I not guarded and tended your brutes well? For six long years—long years—have I not been to you a good servant? You're a hard man, Joel Haggart,

but look me full in the face, and say if, debtor though I be, I owe you anything. And say if, were I not weak and crippled, you'd dare to taunt me as you did but now before my child?"

"You've worked for me, but you've been paid. I have had your toil, you have had my money."

"And little enough of it."

"Why, you see, Roger, you weren't, at the best, worth much; and now you aren't worth so much as you were. You're a poor feeble animal, and you know you could not get work from anybody near here but me. You see, although bygones may be bygones, you're nought but an emancipated jail-bird. And what is a chap without a *character*?"

"Hist, fool!" responded my father, quickly, "not so loud; I would not have my little one know I have been in prison. True, it was years ago, and it was for helping you in a

little affair that was no great crime ; but she may not know it."

A cunning smile ran across Joel's face as he heard the supplication, and saw his power. Clearing his throat and folding his arms, he resumed the conversation in a style of unctuous morality that would become an Evangelical preacher in Bethesda Chapel.

"Don't be afraid, Roger Copley ; far be it from me to lower a parent in the eyes of that parent's child, for what would become of the blessed infant if it could not look up with filial affection and reverence to the author of its being ? And if I alluded to a little difficulty that is now gone and past—indeed, a passage in your early life that you don't care about walking through again—it wasn't done to crush your broken spirit, or overwhelm you with a sense of your corruption and unworthiness, but just to remind you what your position was when I took you in hand. As I said,

you haven't got a *character*. You're not like me, who have a *character*. Ah! I have good reason for thankfulness. What a sweet thing it is to be looked up to as a righteous, God-fearing, upright man! But, Roger, to return to that matter of the rent, and the money advanced. Principal and interest, it altogether amounts to four pounds, seventeen shillings, and sixpence."

"Not one farthing of which can I pay."

"Now look you, Roger, what would you say if I told you this morning I meant to do a liberal thing, and set all square between us about the rent, and allow the question about the money advanced to stand over for the present—what would you say?"

"I should ask what it was you wanted to tempt me to do."

"A sensible answer; and the service ain't a hard one. It will be a sweet moonlight night, to-night, man, and you'll like a drive

for the sake of driving away the rheumatics and giving tone to your constitution. Well, about nightfall, a man whose name is Joel Haggart will drive a light cart and strong horse up here, and leave the animal and trap tied up in the shed at the bottom of the hog-yard. I am a bit of a prophet, and something after midnight you will get into this cart, and drive quietly along the lanes till you come to the corner of the long plantation at Melton Stubbs, and there you'll wait under the cover of the trees until some friends of yours—quite old acquaintances, pals you have nothing to fear from—come and put a few sacks into your cart. Then you'll drive the vehicle off, full pelt, along the lower road to Tutbury, until you are about three miles beyond Martlesham Red Lion, on the turn-pike, where another mate, in a trap very similar to your own, will relieve you of your cargo. Now, are you the man for my money ? ”

“No, I am not, Joel Haggart,” replied my father, sullenly. “You may sell me up, and starve me, but I’ll have nought to do with such work as this. I can’t do much for little Miriam, but she shall not say I blotted my fame after it belonged to her, so cease tempting me.”

“No cant. You’re a coward, and ’tis because you fear that there may be a row, and a few awkward shots fired, and not because you care for the weal of that black-eyed babe of yours, that you hold off from joining us. Come, man, remember what your courage was years back in these matters, when you were called ‘Ranting Roger!’ Your muscles may have been cramped and withered by cold and rheumatism, and hunger and hard times may have made your blood cold and thin, but don’t let it be said that dare-devil Roger died a shivering coward.”

I could, from my hiding-place, see my father’s

face as Joel Haggart tried to rouse the passions of his youth, and I remarked that it wore an expression of contempt and amusement as well as of firmness of purpose; but this aspect changed when, after a few minutes further parley, Joel Haggart altered his tone, and laying aside both bluster and mocking, said in a low, husky, rattling voice:—

“You must know, Roger Copley, I will have no nonsense here. I have asked you to be my assistant as a friend, and you have refused; now I command you as a slave. It’s a point of pride as well as gain with me, to clear the Burnham estate of every head of game this year; and I’ll do it; and *you shall drive the cart as I tell you*. Whimpering hound as you are, and fit only to feed hogs, I’ll use you, because it wouldn’t be prudent to send any of my regular gang across the country with the cart, and because you know

too well what is for your interest to think of turning on me and peaching."

"Joel Haggart," returned my father in a hoarse whisper, with the sweat standing in drops on his brow, "we know each other well. I am in your power, and you are in mine. Though I am your drudge, and eat the crust your money buys, I could put a halter round your neck any day I left off caring whether or no I too died on the gallows. But you can rest certain that I shan't give you trouble with blabbing about old times; so why not let me rest here? and why drag me into more peril and into danger I am not fit for?"

"No words—no more maundering," Joel Haggart answered, stamping his foot on the ground, and pouring forth a torrent of oaths. "By the Lord who made us, if you give me any trouble, you shall rue your folly!" He added more in a low whisper, the purport of which I could not hear. Perhaps in my

anxiety that nothing of the interview should escape me I stepped forward, and in so doing disturbed the bushes that afforded me concealment. Anyhow, Joel Haggart, either by his quick ear detecting a rustling amongst the leaves, or by his keen eye catching sight of my raiment, became aware of my position of observation, and in a voice of rage that made me tremble to the centre of my bones, he cried, "Come out, you skulking little she-devil. Come here, and tell me what you mean by acting the spy and eaves-dropper on me and your father, or in five minutes there shall not be a whole bone left in your body."

My only chance of safety was to put a bold face on it; so I tripped up with an air of as complete unconcern as my beating heart would allow me to assume, and declared that I was falsely accused of listening.

"I have not heard a word of your talk, Mr. Haggart. After I had counted over the

hogs, as father told me, I came up the garden again, and sat down on the bank there, beyond the reach of hearing, and I haven't heard a syllable you have said."

The firmness with which I pleaded "Not Guilty" evidently staggered my accuser, and made him hesitate whether or not he should believe me. With an expression of countenance that combined with singular force suspicion and cruelty, he eyed me through and through, and then turning to my father, inquired roughly:—

"Do you believe her?"

"I never knew her tell a lie, and she is above the meanness of listening," responded my father.

"She'd better be!" rejoined Joel Haggart, shaking his enormous fist at me, and once again turning his cruel gaze on my face. It was a painful influence that those crafty eyes had on me; my knees trembled, and such

extreme pain struck me in the region of the heart that I fancied I must have cried out.

Still keeping me steadily in his sight, Joel Haggart lowered his voice to an awful husky whisper, that seemed as if it must have proceeded from some venomous reptile rather than from a human creature, and addressed to my father slowly, steadily, and with devilish emphasis, the following words:—"Roger Copley, keep your eye on that little imp. She's up to mischief. She no listener! She no eaves-dropper! Mark my words, she *is*. She mayn't have listened this time, but she is a sly, lying, crafty, thieving little vixen. If ever you catch her hanging about, and using her ears where she ought not, *let her know it*—*let her know it*. Take from that hazel-bush there a good, supple, knotted wand, or, for fear of mishap and lest it should break too soon, take two lithe, supple, knotted

wands ; then holding her by the hair of her head with your left hand, take a wand in your right, and teach her how to *dance*—flog her ! flog her ! flog her !

The intense significance the speaker gave to these words by the deliberation with which he uttered them, and the manifest relish with which he gloated over the picture he had drawn, even at this distance of time, causes me to shudder with horror. Doubtless the man's object was to arouse my childish fear to the highest possible pitch, and so convert me into his cowed awe-struck slave. He perfectly succeeded in his purpose. The terror with which that villain inspired me lasted till his dying day, and even now, to reflect upon it gives me a sensation of loathing, and sickness, and dread.

My brain reeled. The trees, the bushes, the plants, the fields, the sheds spun round me confusedly. I saw my father's eyes flash

furiously at the brute who had dared to contemplate such outrage on a weak child, and having staggered away to a distant part of the garden, I sank down stupefied with alarm on the ground.

For some minutes I was deprived of consciousness, and when I recovered my senses, I saw my father and Joel Haggart still in conversation; but they had changed their position in the garden, and were standing so near to me again, that I could distinctly hear their words.

“Then as your weak heart has a fondness,” Joel Haggart was saying, “for that child, obey me—or it will not be many weeks ere you are separated from her. If you get sent to prison again, or if you get lagged and sent abroad for the rest of your days, you wont see much more of your daughter. By Gorms! she is a pretty little crittur. She grows like her mother. What a dear pretty gal her mother was!”

My father winced as his companion continued :—"How times and circumstances alter, Roger Copley ! 'Tisn't more than twenty years ago since your father was looked upon as a decent well-to-do farmer. But times were hard, and he took to writing other names besides his own on bits of paper, and—he had to go abroad. I used to work for him when I was a boy ; and many a good beating he has given me. Do you know, when I think of how he used to treat me, and how well nigh he was to killing me, it makes me feel quite pleasant to know how I have his son in my power, and that if I choose to thrash him within an inch of his life, he would have to bear it without complaining. Then, after the farm was broken up, and the old man sent beyond seas, you hung about here for years, trying to live by higgling and dealing. You had something like an education, and you were quite a fine fellow, with

your jokes and songs at all the beer-shops round about. But you drank, and got into trouble; and you turned poacher, and were sent to prison."

My father's head bowed as the recollections became more and more painful to him.

"Then, when you were at liberty, and no respectable person would give you work, or bread, or pity, or have anything to do with you, the pretty girl, Miriam Sandford, who had known you in better times, and who might have married more than one young farmer in the neighbourhood with money in his pouch, took your side against all the world—poor fool! as if she could fight her betters—and married you. She was a rare girl, I'll own it, and mayhap she would have made you in time a decent man, but she died too soon,—more's the pity! She just gave birth to that little one, and was laid in the

churchyard. Mark me, Roger Copley, I was a meek milk-and-water fool once on a time, and I loved that girl with all my heart and soul and strength, but she scorned me; she wouldn't have me, and took you in preference. There's no wonder, Roger, that I love you, and like to protect you, and give you work and a crust of bread when you can't get them elsewhere. Perhaps sometimes I am a little proud when I think how, though she flouted and jeered and despised me, I am acting a friendly part by her husband, and doing a father's duty to her child."

"Joel Haggart," said my father, huskily, "in memory of her, let me off this night's duty."

"No — no," was the chuckling answer; "not for a sentiment, Roger—not for a sentiment. So make ready for to-night."

Abruptly turning away, Joel Haggart passed through the garden gate, and climbed

once more to the seat of his cart. The horse, which had stood quietly during the long interview his master had had with my father, pawed the ground impatiently, and then dashed forwards; but Joel Haggart reined him in, and waited for half a minute longer, to take a crown from his pocket, and throw it on the ground at his servant's feet.

“There, get something to stay your hunger with, and put a little courage into your watery blood,” he cried, as he drove off at a gallop.

In servile fashion, my father stooped, picked up the white money, surveyed it with glistening eyes, and put it into his pocket.

CHAPTER III.

A MOONLIGHT RAMBLE.

I WISHED my father had spat on the money and flung it away contemptuously. Why I wished so, I could not have said. It was not from any consideration that the money was thrown to him as if he had been a dog, or that it was hardly won even as it had been insolently given. I was a child ; and children, though they entertain strange philosophies in their dreamings, do not draw such subtle

distinctions in worldly matters ; and, moreover, I was hungry, and poor, and a fainting stomach is not over particular in the colour and quality of the bread that is about to fill it. Still, I would contentedly have fasted all that day, and the next one too, if my father, after picking the coin up, had hurled it with a curse after Joel Haggart's receding wheels. A cold presentiment stole over me that it was payment for work that was to close in disaster.

Briefly telling me that he should be back in the course of an hour, Roger Copley put on his crushed hat, and strolled down the lane in the direction of our village, some two miles distant, where the beer-house and bread-shop held high positions amongst the houses of business.

Left to myself, I had much to reflect upon. What strange news had I heard ! what astounding intelligence had I received within

the preceding two hours ! What ! my father formerly a prisoner ! I, Miriam Copley, the child of a disgraced man ! the daughter of one who had been punished by “the law,” and who trembled lest I should become acquainted with his degradation ? What crime had he committed ? Murder ? False-swearing ? Robbery ? It must have been something strangely wicked, for he and Joel Haggart had both spoken as if each held the life of the other in his own keeping. And now a light of revelation burst upon me, showing me the answers of many riddles that I had puzzled and fretted my little brain over in lonely hours, and bringing to my notice other questions as painful as those it gave replies to. Now I knew why my father’s cottage was shunned and avoided as an unholy spot — why neighbours never entered it with hearty greetings, like those I had often heard making the

music of other poor men's dwellings, as I unheeded passed the opened doors—why no woman, save good Susan Latchett, liked to cross our threshold for friendly gossip—why, when children of my own age met me in the fields and lanes, they ran away as if a serpent were in their path threatening destruction—why, when I daringly, and under the impulse of curiosity, had forced my timid trembling self under the church porch, and up to the seats where the peasant's children sate, they drew off from me and huddled together with looks both of fear and menace, as a flock of sheep resent and are panic-struck by the advance of an intruder. Heaven help me; I was contaminated! The taint of my grandfather's and father's crimes was in my blood, and rendered me an object of detestation to all honest people who came nigh me. Then the thought came to me that it was hard and cruel in men to punish me for sins that I had

never committed ; but this rebellious feeling was checked and dispelled by the memory of a certain passage in the Commandments, taught me by my father, rogue though he was, which reminded me of what the way of our Father in Heaven is, and made me with lowly submission accept my bitter lot as necessary, and therefore just.

Another instant, and by a sudden twist of the mind I was thinking how much happier I might have been, if what had been hadn't been. Possibly, for a few brief moments, I regarded my poor parent as an enemy, to whom was due a debt of vengeance instead of gratitude ; but all irritation with him passed clean away, even as the shadow of a cloud sweeps over a sunny plain, leaving no tinge of darkness in its track, when I recalled the affecting language with which, in the early morning, he had pointed to our mutual relation, and in words, the full significance of

which now burst upon me, had implored my pardon for giving me form and power to crawl on the earth's surface. The reader will smile, and I smile too, as I record that I sobbed convulsively under the recognition of how very dear to me was my father. Little fool that I was, I loved him all the more because the world and he were at variance, and he had been dishonourably vanquished in the contest! What a fearful abnormal child I must have been! Thank my better self, and the teachings of prudence, I have long since displayed greater discernment in choosing the objects of my affection, and have learned to see the excellence of the fortunate and the loveliness of strength.

When the afternoon had fairly set in, my father returned from his excursion to the village, with a store of bread and cheese for me, and a bottle of strong drink for himself. It was not out of selfishness that he gave

none of the latter to me, for he knew so well the great harm continued "drops of comfort" had done his own nature, that it would have been no expression of fatherly care, had he pressed me to join him in his pernicious pleasure.

The rest of the day he was moody and silent. Once or twice I tried to entice him to renew the confidences of the morning, but he repelled my overtures, and I was constrained to sit silently, waiting for the night that seemed as if it would never come, and keeping my big thoughts to myself. We had no clock, or time-piece of any kind, amongst our scanty possessions, but habit had given me great accuracy in measuring the course of the day by the position of the sun. Intently I watched the great orb of light as the leaden moments lagged slowly on, and more than once I was on the point of crying with

vexation, because it persisted in remaining stationary, and refused to sink permanently behind the hill. As if it would quicken the progress of time, I bustled about; and performed the few duties that devolved on me long before it was either necessary or right to discharge them. The pigs had their nocturnal rations allotted to them an hour sooner than was customary, and I spread a coarse cloth on our solitary table for supper, ere the slightest mist of dusk had fallen on the brightness of the afternoon. My restlessness would not have escaped my father's observation, had not all the faculties of his mind been engrossed by some all-absorbing subject, that caused him to sit with knit brows, and clenched hands that moved only when he took the dram-bottle from his pocket and put it to his lips.

"It is coming on cold, father," I observed, with the intention of provoking him into con-

versation, when he drew his chair up to the table to take his evening meal.

He shuddered at the word "cold," but made no answer.

"The mist is rising fast from the low meadows, and it will be very cold to-night for those who have to cross them," I continued, slightly varying my former remark.

"Who told you I was going out to-night?" he demanded sharply, eyeing me with a forcible look of displeasure.

"Lord! father, I never said you were going out to-night, but that it will be cold to-night," was my quick response.

"Umph—yes—it will be cold—very cold."

I did not renew my endeavours to induce him to be chatty, but consumed my bread and cheese and water in silence. The cravings of hunger satisfied, I packed away the plates, and table-cloth, and remaining provision, and availing myself of the darkness, fast

becoming darker, as an excuse for retiring to bed, I approached my father and bade him good-night.

“Roger Copley, good-night. I hope the rheumatism will let you sleep. Say ‘God bless you,’ to your little daughter.”

He started—for I had spoken in that silvery, demure, feigned voice, which I had discovered to be a powerful music to him. He looked sharply at me, but there was tenderness in the quick glance of his eyes; and he took me roughly by the arm, but his horny hand trembled.

“That voice, Miriam,” he said huskily, “is the voice of your mother, and she has taught it to you—God bless you! God bless you! little daughter—don’t stop and talk now, for I want to be alone.”

Not many minutes elapsed before I was in bed, watching the moon rise up in the silent heavens, and deriving enjoyment, notwith-

standing the terrible excitement of my mind, from the rays that streamed through the dull diamond-shaped panes of my garret window. Pondering on all that had transpired during the hours that had passed since my eyes last opened from sleep, and striving to banish from my mind the hateful image of Joel Haggart beating a shrieking child to death, and vaguely wondering whether the inhabitants of the calm lunar world fretted, and struggled, and were miserable, like the pitiful millions of slaves who had descended from the exiles of Eden, I waited impatiently for the time of action. At 8 o'clock, or thereabouts, I rose from my restless bed, and crept to the window with noiseless steps, to refresh myself with looking across the valley. The low meadows were bathed in radiance; the shadows of the trees fell with clear edges, black as pitch, across the luminous ground; and the dikes and winding river, that crossed and meandered

through the grass-land, were brilliant as burnished steel, or lustrous and dark as polished jet. My eyes were strained far away to where the fringe of the distant woodland height kissed the starred firmament, when the click of the gate at the bottom of the hog-yard made me start. A man was leading a horse and cart into the yard—into the shed that abutted on the low meadows. Even if there had been no light to enable me to discern objects, the suffocating heaviness that suddenly came over the atmosphere, and the nervous twitching of my limbs, would have informed me that Joel Haggart was at hand.

He remained in the shed long enough to secure his horse, and then emerging from the darkness into the full moonlight, approached the cottage. When he came beneath my window of observation, my father advanced and greeted him, and the two parleyed together for a couple of minutes, but their

voices were inaudible to me, till they passed into the ground-room beneath me, when, though they muttered in low tones, scarcely above a whisper, I could distinguish their words.

“It’ll be touchy work to-night, Roger. That cursed moon wants a curtain. But there are clouds coming up. Why can’t they be quicker? Is there no wind to drive them?”

“A wind would bring up the clouds quicker, Joel Haggart, but it would also carry the sound of your guns further than you might wish.”

“Right, Roger, right. It is better as it is—and the men have a skirting of timber to cover them almost the whole range through, should that blockhead Purvey get on their track. But he wont—he’s outwitted. A knowing dog he thinks himself, but my eye-teeth were cut sharper than his. I’ve dodged him for once.”

“Ay? dodged him?”

“It’ll raise my reputation through the three counties. Master Purvey has received *special* information of our intentions, and he and all his gang have moved over to the Parham hills to look out for us. When they are there, they’ll hear our guns about Fieldhead and Burnham, and will come round by Snape Marsh, hurry-scurry to catch us. Let ’em, that’s my game. They’ll come to Burnham an hour after we have left it, and they’ll leave the Parham Hills just in time for my men to walk over ’em without interruption, and strip every cover and plantation of every blessed head of game. Ain’t it a grand plan, worthy of a general?”

“There’ll be danger.”

“You, at least, wont share it. All you have to do is to be with the cart where I told you, at Melton Stubbs. If there is a scrimmage, it wont be there.”

“I am not afraid of danger.”

“Well said, Roger—well said. But I must be off, for I have to walk a matter of twenty miles before I meet you i’ the morning. Mind, my regiment will have dispersed at least an hour before you see me. I and Jack Tandy will carry the bags to the Stubbs. We have got a tidy bit of muscle between us, and if they are too heavy for us, we shall leave part at my crib at Catton Ferry for a few days, till we can fetch them off quiet and free of observation. But before I go, man, take a little jumping-powder out of my flask.”

“No—I have had enough to drink.”

“Then pour some out into your own bottle, and keep it for to-morrow.”

This amicable suggestion having been acted upon, Joel Haggart took his departure on foot. The difference between his bearing towards my father in this brief interview and his behaviour in the morning, struck me with surprise. I was not then aware how community of

danger and the excitement of a common enterprise can soften away the harshness of social distinctions, and make a martinet colonel address and treat his soldiers as fellow-men and comrades, and yet leave him, ready as ever, when the city has been stormed and sacked, and the peril is past, to enforce discipline with the cat and triangles.

Once again I was left alone to continue my anxious and protracted night-watch. The sight of my father and Joel Haggart had exercised all the effects of social intercourse on me, and the time during which I spied at, and listened to them, seemed, as I looked back upon it in my silence and solitude, thrice its actual duration. The loneliness and the turbulence of my thoughts were almost too much for my fortitude and powers of endurance; more than half-a-dozen times I was on the verge of screaming out hysterically, but I refreshed my spirits and strengthened myself by looking at

the grand determination I had formed, and by reflecting that any betrayal of mental perturbation might prevent my carrying it into effect. My resolve was a bold one for a little child; for my settled purpose was to follow unseen my father to Melton Stubbs, and be a spectator of all that should there take place.

Slowly—slowly—with torturing tardiness, two more hours passed away, and then I heard a man with heavy, but furtive tread, enter the cottage from the garden, and ascend the staircase. In another instant my father was in my bed-room. He had made as little noise as possible while climbing the narrow steps, so as not to break the slumber in which he hoped and expected to find me steeped; and now he approached the mattress on which I lay, with one of his horny hands carefully shading the rushlight which he held in the other. Had I been a wealthy princess, resting amidst precious jewels, and he a robber, bent on

murder and plunder, he could not have crept to my couch with less noise ; and had I been the image of a saint, and he a devout worshipper, he could not have manifested more religious fervour than he did as he proceeded to kneel on the floor by the side of his little girl. What he said, I know not ; for, though his lips moved in obedience to the impulse of his stirred nature, the words were audible to none but that great God “who made and loveth all.” When he had concluded his prayer he rose, and stood over me for at least two minutes, looking at me and suspecting, as, in the cowardice of deceit, I fancied, that my sleep was feigned. Then he turned away from me, but not forthwith to leave the room. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened a deal box that was stationed on the floor at the foot of a second mattress, on which he was in the habit of sleeping. This chest was small, and, in every respect, of a common and cheap

make, but it had always been to my infantile mind an object of esteem and even reverence ; mystery and awe surrounded it. It had never been unlocked in my presence, indeed I questioned whether it had ever been opened at all. What it contained ; whence it came into my father's possession ; to whom it had belonged before coming into his hands—all these, and many other points connected with that modest box I had long been at a loss about. I knew right well that my father set a high, indeed, a superstitious value upon it, for the smartest whipping I ever received from his hand was bestowed on me for cutting a sliver off the lid with an old shut-knife he had given me for a plaything.

And now I heard him draw this box towards his person ; I heard the key turn in the lock ; I heard the lid fly up with a smothered crack, as if it enjoyed its unwont liberty. At last the mystery was to be solved ; the riddle read ;

darkness dispelled. The busy heart within my small breast had been beating fast before ; now it rattled and thumped against the sternum with a force and velocity that were alarming. With fear and trembling I widened the crevice between my hypocritical eyelids, and was the beholder of a scene I could not then comprehend, but on which I have often in my after life moralized. With his back to me, kneeling on the rough boards of our chamber floor, and inclining over the open box, was my father, gravely and solemnly raising in his hands, inspecting, and laying on the mattress before him, the following articles of feminine apparel :—a lilac gown of printed calico, a plain straw bonnet, trimmed with bows of white riband and an abundance of net-cap ; a black silk apron, divers articles of under-linen, a pair of stout shoes, and—I finish with the most magnificent article—a large and really well-

looking shawl, of a material composed of wool and cotton, and of various colours, in which crimson dominated. Had all the treasures of the Sultan's harem been showered before me, I should not have been more dazzled and confounded than I was by this unlooked-for display. Such costly and splendid raiment, it seemed to me, I had never before set my eyes on. It was impossible to keep altogether still in the presence of such stores. I shifted in my bed, and sat up, so as to get a fuller view, thereby running the risk of attracting my father's attention. But he was too deeply engrossed to heed the slight disturbance caused by my movement, for he remained for several minutes eyeing the paraphernalia, and it was not till he had replaced each thing neatly and orderly in the box, and had locked the box, and pushed it back to its usual place, that he rose from his knees, and once more turned and looked at—his slumbering child.

At length he quitted the room, shut the door, groped his way down the stairs, and, leaving the house, went down the yard to the piggery. Quick as a flash of lightning I leapt from my bed, and having put on my ordinary clothes with a celerity that at least proved my fingers were "used to their trade," I crept into the garden, without making the noise of a mouse, cantering over a smooth carpet, and concealed myself behind the swill-tubs. Scarcely had I effected this, when my father backed the cart out of the shed, turned the horse, and led it through the upper gate into the drift that opened into the main road, that passed our cottage. When he had fastened the last gate behind him, he mounted the cart and drove away for a mile at a steady, but slow trot of six miles an hour. Silently, stealthily, under the shadow of the fence, I ran after him. Like a cat pursuing its prey, with long, noiseless, regular strides, ere it

makes the final pounce on its victim, I hastened on, with my head forwards, and selecting for my course the spots that were darkest with the lush grass so that my steps should not be heard. On—on—and still on. Once, when my breath was almost gone, I stumbled and fell, and, ere I could get up, the object of my chase was out of sight, and when I again proceeded to speed on I could not hear his wheels. Either he had stopped, or been spirited away, or my hearing had failed me. Had I missed him? Had he diverged into some route across the adjacent meadows, where his cart tracked noiselessly? No—there he was, again in sight, and allowing his horse to walk leisurely. Over Marlesford common, round the dark corner where the hall lodge stood, up the sandy hill, and over Bromeswell Heath, he went at a pace never exceeding four miles an hour. I was always within a hundred yards of him. Sometimes

he stopped, and having descended from his vehicle, walked himself. Twice he looked back, and I trembled lest he should discern me crouching behind the furze-bushes that dotted the way-side. Only once did he encounter a passenger on his peaceful way; but this wayfarer was an unusually inquisitive one—a gentleman in a gig, and driving a spirited high-mettled horse.

“Haigh, my man! where are you off to this fine night?” cried this person to my father.

“Wickham,” was the reply.

“And what have you got so precious in your cart that you must cover it up with a tarpaulin this fine night?”

“Coals. I did not know that it was going to be fine to-night when I started off this morning—you’ll not remain a fool for want of asking questions.”

“Yours is a fine horse to use for coal-carrying,” retorted the gentleman, still curbing

in his fretful steed, which began to rear and leap from one side of the road to the other in a very unpleasant manner.

“You — fool,” roared my father, “never mind my horse. Look after your own.”

The advice was neither unneeded nor given too soon, for in another instant the indignant creature stood straight up on his hind legs, and seizing the bit between its teeth, dashed off at full gallop, bearing the gig along at the rate of twenty miles an hour. Crouching on the bank, I heard the driver swear a furious oath, and I felt the air quickened as man, and horse, and carriage flew past me. Luckily the road was straight, and wide, and no accident ensued, for I and my father both remained without stirring till our ears informed us that the imprudent man, on reaching the summit of a distant hill, recovered the command of his beast.

After this, nothing occurred till we arrived

at Melton Stubbs. When we reached that spot, I was so beaten with fatigue that I could scarce put one foot before the other, and a sharp spasm crossed my chest every time I drew breath. It was lucky for me that Melton Stubbs stood where it did, for not a hundred yards farther could I have proceeded, when my father drew up a few paces off the crown of the road under the dense boughs of the skirting timber of the long plantation. On either side of the way were magnificent oaks, ashes, and maples, that afforded an umbrage of the deepest gloom, even during the scorching days of midsummer. And now, as Joel Haggart had predicted, the clouds drifted up, and, concealing the moon, deepened the black of the avenue. The change from the bright moonlight, to the Egyptian darkness that now surrounded us, was of itself depressing ; but, as if there were not enough influences at work to chill my blood and make

my heart turn faint with terror, the wind rose plaining through the plantation, and sweeping the fallen leaves with fantastic sounds of pain and distress.

Another hour of tedious waiting! It began to rain, and my father, having lit his pipe, secured his horse by the head, and then got into the cart and sheltered himself under the tarpaulin, for, though the foliage of the boughs overhead was thick, the torrents of water penetrated it. Not daring to lose sight of the cart, I remained in the lurking-place I had selected when we first stationed ourselves in the Stubbs; and, feeling the wet gradually steal through my thin dress, I, resolutely did battle with all the horrors that chased each other through my brain. At length the rain ceased, and my father, coming out from under the covering, paced impatiently up and down the road. He raised his hand to his ear, and listened, but there was no noise in the air

except that of nature's sadness. Again the drops fell faster, and once more he crept back to the cart for shelter.

Then it was that a sound reached my ear. It was a low crushing sound in the dry under-wood, twenty yards below me, and forty yards distant from the cart. It might have proceeded from a horse or cow moving at footpace. But no—it could not be that. It came nearer—was behind—over me. Looking round, I beheld a tall man, bearing a double-barrelled gun. It was too dark to examine his costume, or form any opinion of his appearance, save that he was gifted with unusual height. As I looked at him, his eyes met mine, and they flashed as those of a tiger must when making a fatal spring. His glance burned in the black covert with ruby brightness, and as he scanned me he levelled his gun at my head. In another instant I should have screamed for help, but, either from seeing how

small and helpless I was, or because he feared to cause any clamour or fire a needless shot at a critical moment, he dropped the mouth of his weapon to the ground, and, laying a heavy hand on me, said in a whisper that thrilled my marrow:—

“Hush! I know you—no noise—the keepers are close upon us—and if you’re not able to keep quiet, your father, and I, and Joel Haggart are dead men.”

“I wont move—I wont speak.”

“That’ll do, you strange little devil; now I’m off to save your father. Don’t stir, whatever happens, and I’ll be back in five minutes to look after you.”

So awe-struck that I could not at the instant have uttered a word, or walked a step, had I tried to break my promise, I saw the man creep on, crouching down, and resembling in the darkness a huge dog, rather than a human creature. My eyes were able to follow

his course till he reached the cart, indeed, till he had gone a few paces beyond it. Remembering then his parting words, I was astonished at seeing him steal *past* my father, who was lying, sleepy and heavy with drink, in the cart. What could it mean? Was it treachery? Had I held my tongue when I ought to have given warning? Anyhow, I resolved in an instant to be nearer the scene of action, and, springing to my feet (which, to my surprise, obeyed my will), I hurried along at the bottom of the ditch that ran beneath the plantation palings, and, ere many seconds had elapsed, was within a yard of the horse.

“Hist!—father—father—up! there’s danger,” I cried in a shrill under-tone not much louder than a whisper.

“D—n!” he roared, throwing the covering off his body, and leaping up as if a galvanic current had imparted activity to his limbs. “Who brought you here?”

But it was no time either to make or answer questions. The alarm had been given too late; the fray had already begun. A shot was fired thirty paces in front, and forward rushed my father—leaving me alone—to throw himself into the peril. I heard oaths and cries, and the noise as of two or more men struggling with each other locked in a deadly embrace. Too panic-struck to be otherwise than courageous, I hastened to the very spot of the contest, and arrived upon it in time to see the gigantic gamekeeper, who had addressed me a few instants before, spring from the ground, on which he had fallen with his first antagonist beneath him, and having freed himself from my father's gallant but weak grasp, seize a gun from the turf at his feet, and strike him a deadly back-handed blow with it on the back of the head. My father fell like a bullock knocked down at a butcher's shambles. Without a cry, or sigh, or single agony, he dropt beneath the murder-

ous blow dealt on the posterior part of the skull. But speedily was his death avenged. A second shot was fired by a marksman stationed behind a tree ; and he who, for two brief instants, had appeared the victor in the sharp battle, threw up his arms with a loud yell— staggered backwards like a drunken man— and sunk lifeless on the body of the wretch whose soul he had just before despatched to the unknown world.

Throughout my observation of this encounter, I kept standing in the ditch, along the bottom of which I had run, when I quitted my first post and endeavoured to make my father aware of the imminent danger. And now, instead of scrambling out of the trench and throwing myself on Roger Copley, as unquestionably all lovers of melo-drama would have done, I deemed it prudent to keep quiet for a few seconds and see the drama to its close. In an instant a man, clearly he who

had picked off the gamekeeper from behind the tree, jumped from a high bank down on the road-side, and walking up to within three paces of the crouching child, who, without breathing, speculated on his movements, proceeded deliberately to inspect the three bodies that lay prostrate on the ground.

“Dead!—dead!—stone-dead! you wont give me any more trouble, Master Purvey,” said this man in a harsh voice that I well knew, as he pulled the form of the trusty keeper round, and by an artistic examination of his wound and the state of his heart, satisfied himself that life had fled.

“Hullo! Roger?—what?—you gone too? No? not a beat of the pulse? Drat the clouds, why don’t they give me a little light, for I can’t leave you without being certain that the life has left you?”

“Don’t trouble yourself, Joel,” said the voice of the first man who had been sent to

the ground, "he has got his drowse. I saw him drop, and if he ever orders another glass I'll pay for it."

"What, Jack Tandy, 'tis you?—and you're all safe?"

"Not done for, yet. Don't you wish I was, Joel?" inquired the fellow, getting up and chuckling.

"Well, Jack," was the cool response of Joel Haggart, "it would have been a neater business, and been on the whole more convenient for me, if you had taken a charge of shot into your lungs. For, you see, you are so prepared to go; and an ugly story is much better kept by one than two."

Jack Tandy was evidently a humorous scoundrel, for he laughed agreeably at this address, and only brought his expressions of mirthful satisfaction to a close, that he might remind his friend of the necessity of removing their persons from the field of slaughter as quickly as possible.

“As to that poor brute,” observed Jack Tandy, jauntily, kicking my father’s body with his right foot, “he got a settler at the back of his head, with the muzzle of Purvey’s gun.”

“Don’t abuse him, Jack, and don’t lift your foot against him,” replied Joel Haggart with a sneer, “he came of a good stock; the blood of the old Copleys is in him; and his father was transported (lucky to escape hanging—he was condemned to it) for forgery. Moreover he has been my guest for a sort of years, and we were friends in early youth, and what’s more, we both loved the same girl. So if you will pardon the weakness of a frail crittur, Jack Tandy, I will take the melancholy satisfaction of setting it beyond doubt, that he is sent out o’ the power of troubling us.”

Joel’s curiosity seemed so altogether reasonable, and even laudable, to Mr. Tandy, that he condescended to assist in a surgical exami-

nation of the injury his fallen comrade's skull had received. The two men kneeled together on the ground, and pursued their investigation as coolly and sagaciously as a couple of hospital surgeons would have done, the one slightly elevating the body, and the other using his hands to ascertain the extent and character of the damage.

“Drat it, what a smash! The skull-bone must be fractured and starred like a pane of glass!” Such was Joel's comment when he let go the dead man's head, and rose from the turf. But no time was to be lost. In all probability, the guns fired during the affray had been heard in the distance, and Purvey's under-keepers and helps were speeding to the bloody ground to avenge his death. The first and most important business was to escape from the locality of the tragedy.

With common motives, and with no more delay or words, Jack Tandy and Joel Haggart

prepared for flight. The former unfastened the strap that tied the horse's head to the plantation-gate, and the latter, having sprung up the opposite bank and disappeared for a few seconds, speedily came back with a couple of sacks upon his shoulders. With equal celerity, Jack Tandy leaped into the adjoining field, and returned with two other bags crammed with game. In a twinkling the spoil and the spoilers were in the cart, and the horse inspirited by Joel Haggart's whistle and lash, was galloping furiously through the unfrequented bye-roads and lanes.

And what did the little girl do in that dark and terrible hour, left in dreary solitude with the corpses of her father and his murderer lying with their sullen faces turned up to the clouded heavens? Did she fall back numbed into unconsciousness with terror? Did she passionately wring her hands, and implore the aid of that Father who defends with constant

care the widow and orphan? Or, stricken with the ghastly horrors of what she had witnessed, did she complain miserably, and with a sense of impotence to struggle with the tide of trouble that whelmed past her, sit watching it motionless and despairing?—No!—That child crawled out of the ditch, stealthily drew near her father's form, and with a heart beating loudly, introduced her hand into her father's pocket, and took from it the key of a certain deal box. And with this acquisition clutched in her hand and clasped against her bosom, the maiden ran—mile after mile—mile after mile—over stones, through mud and mire, across a weary waste of common, and threading a network of rutted lanes until, just as dawn was breaking, she stumbled, faint, hungry, bemired, almost senseless with fatigue, across the threshold of what a few hours before had been her father's cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEXT DAY.

WITHOUT deliberation—and it is without deliberation we usually take our wisest steps in life—I crept into bed and slept profoundly—and for hours. How untroubled was my conscience, drugged with the matchless opiate of bodily fatigue! No cruel dream, no ghostly spectres of men struggling for life and falling dead, scared me in my chamber. When I awoke, it was broad day-

light, and more—the brightness of a clear September day had received the first softening touches of the sun's setting. The outer world was not allowed to break upon me gradually, gently loosing the bands of unconsciousness with drowsy murmurings of intelligence and wayward coqueties with reason. There was a thundering blow on the outer door, that no less weighty a weapon than a sledgehammer or a hobnailed boot could have produced; and this salute was followed by a quick rattan of minor strokes, each of which would have gone some way towards braining a rhinoceros.

“Here they are!” I cried, and sprung out of bed.

Who were “they?” What did I mean by using the word? I had no friends. The simple truth was that as the noise reached my ear, and the sun's rays streamed through my dazed eyes, it flashed upon me that

the immediate consequence of the last night's events would be my temporary advancement into social celebrity and popularity with my neighbours, and that an assembly of admirers already waited below to offer me homage. Some moralists—for the most part, those cynical followers of Diogenes who inhabit tubs from compulsion rather than choice—are very severe on the emptiness of ordinary friendships, and the frivolity and selfishness mere worldlings display in seeking out and laying aside acquaintances. For my part, I am of a contented disposition, am ready to take human nature as I find it, and though I never profess to entertain any high regard for it, have too good an opinion of it to think that my sarcasms and reproaches will ever make my neighbours better. So, I jog on amicably with all the bearded and flounced creatures around me, and for the sake of their self-love and my own comfort, make it a rule

to have my words and actions rather below than above the ordinary moral standard of my time,—not requiring my companions to adapt themselves to me ; but, out of prudence and easy *savoir faire*, conforming myself to them, and being a different kind of person, according to the locality in which I am placed. I climatize rapidly, and my skin changes colour as the heat of the sun increases or diminishes. In London, I select my society according to the received rules. Possibly the rules are not good ; but that's no affair of mine, I did not make them. If I apply them judiciously, gracefully, and with generosity, my duty is done, and my conscience may rest in peace. Consequently, every season I provide feasts, and ask revellers to them ; not because they are the strongest and best people to be found, or because they are maimed and halt ; not because I can do them good—and only some-

times, because they can do good to me. I ask two or three hundred men and women to my house, out of no particular motive, except that I have been in the habit of inviting them, from no particular motive, for a series of years. These are quite my old friends—*my dear old friends*. With much diplomacy, I bring to my board a prince of royal blood—a leading cabinet minister—a great lady about the court—and the heiress of the season, although they are formal and stiff, and bore me with their silliness, because I like that common folk, whom I neither care for nor would help, should read in the papers that such celebrities have been my guests. I ask ladies—not because I love them, or because they are virtuous, but because they dress well, speak French with a good accent, are either rich or good-looking, or married to the men I like flirting with, belong to the right set, and would die rather than violate

good taste. I bring round me a swarm of club-danglers—numerous as hosts of locusts, and as sharp of sting—because they assiduously flatter and smile upon me, and lay themselves out to tickle my vanity. I hate popular preachers—one because he is a vulgar Dissenter, and abuses the Church in bad English; another, because he is a High Churchman, and is continually levelling shafts of satire at his own archbishop; another, because his gambling debts have compelled him to defraud honest creditors, and the legal process of passing through the Insolvent's Court has made him more the rage than ever; another, because he is an honest fool; and another, because he is an eloquent swindler. I summon my doctor, because I am in his power, and I don't want him to blab secrets; and a great surgeon, because he is in the confidence of illustrious personages, and makes thirty thousand a-year, although he

first rendered himself notorious as the accomplice of Bishop, in the murder of an idiot. I ask philanthropists from the House of Commons, out of genuine sympathy, because they put me in mind of the days when I was on the "look-out" for a place; and I am most liberal in sending cards to two authors—one the editor of a Review, in which my writings and character are systematically attacked; and the other, a fertile poet—and these gentlemen I maintain an alliance with, partly out of feelings of magnanimity and commiseration, and partly because it is unusual, and, therefore, piquant, to meet a literary man in decent society. If these "because" are weak, feeble, and unsatisfactory ones for regulating the choice of my acquaintance, I urge in my defence, that I drop my friends for yet slighter.

I, therefore, neither do now, nor did then, quarrel with my old neighbours for being

suddenly seized with a desire to come to a more intimate knowledge of me. Unexpected events had made me an interesting personage—or, at least, had made them interested in me; and what more can the greatest lion, now taking his meal on the British public, say of his celebrity? I had not improved, but the circumstances and associations of my humble self had. As a work of art, I remained what I ever had been; but fortune had taken me out of a corner, and hung me in a better light. The world had begun to care about me. And there, grouped around the door, I found the world in a ragged costume of battered hats, dusty bonnets, patched fustian, and calico petticoats, clacking in an unusual state of excitement, and, according to its wonted freedom from selfishness, manifesting a lively anxiety to obtain information capable of leading to no earthly good. The parish-

clerk and the village schoolmaster were about the only males present at first, for they were not required, by grinding farmers, to be at field-labour, and the church and popular education get on best when left quite alone. But there was an imposing assortment of matrons, and children of every period of helpless age. As I slipped the bar from the staple, and let the door fly open, a hum, and then a roar, gave expression to the world's excitement.

“ She harn’t washed herself.”

“ She ain’t hooked up behind.”

“ She harn’t got her shoes on.”

“ She’s only just up—a little lazy slut.”

“ But she’ll catch it.”

“ Wont the justices let her know it.”

Such were the first exclamations of “ the world ;” and forthwith, like a pack of frantic dogs, the world rushed into the cottage, scrambled upstairs sniffing for blood, and

clamouring loudly for evidence ; and then, having come down again in turbulent confusion, danced round me—hustled me—called me every name that conveyed the idea of “ deep ” and “ sly,” and then demanded that I should explain myself. What was I to do ? Nature, kindly mother, taught me then to pursue a course that long experience assures me is always the best for an unprotected female placed unexpectedly in a difficulty. I seated myself on the ground, and commenced crying piteously. What I wanted in tears, I made up in noise. I would not utter one intelligible word, for that might have produced a reply, which would, in return, have provoked a rejoinder, and so unpleasant discussion might have ensued. I did not give vent to my grief in silent tears, for I knew that the nerves of the ears are much more intimately connected than those of the eyes with the sources of all gentle emotions.

Squatting on the brick floor, I simply *blared*, —which is the only word that at all expresses the unspeakably abominable row of screams and sobs commingled, with which I drove my audience to the verge of distraction.

“Such grief is often feigned,” said the schoolmaster, nodding his head, with an air of much experience.

“Deceit is the father of lies, and sloth is the mother of evil inventions,” responded the clerk, bowing deferentially to the schoolmaster.

But the clerk and schoolmaster were nowhere on the present occasion. Their influence on the female mind had for the time vanished; and the ladies proclaimed by various gestures and words of contempt that just for once in their lives they were determined to have their rights, and didn't mean to submit to dictation.

“It ain’t a case for men,” boldly said Mrs. Seagrim, a lady who by the nature of her commercial transactions (she was the village shopkeeper), not less than by her imposing and majestic corpulence, had great weight in local gatherings, “to meddle with. I never interferes with men when they keeps in their right places, but when they pushes themselves into my chair, I allus tell ’em there ain’t easy sitting for two. If the gal’s father were here, why, then I should admit he was a man, and shew myself as become a female—who is nothing but a female, though, thank God! thriving in her business. But this gal is a gal, and she so being a gal, this here affair is one to be considered on by women.”

“Ay, ay—women who have had children,” exclaimed, above the general hum of approval, a dame who had contributed a round dozen of stalwart soldiers to the armies of her sovereign.

“Exactly so,” put in a young woman who had been led to the nuptial state only a fortnight before ; “exactly so, Mrs. Seagrim ; and it ain’t no fit place for unmarried girls.”

This was said with a sarcastic toss of the head in the direction of the aged spinster of the immediate vicinity, whom nature in endowing with a beard had rendered contemptible in the estimation of man, whose attention, as we all know, is too frequently not to be attracted by any save personal charms.

The squabbling went on, and so without break or pause did my roaring.

“Drat the child, why can’t she hold her peace ! ”

“We are not going to hurt you.”

“A little worriting vixen—it’s only to put us off the scent.”

“Oh, bless you, she knows a wounded deal more than she will ever let out.”

“My belief is, she is worse than her father.”

Such is a fair sample of the hundreds of voluble and disjointed sentiments that the world, leaving internal differences, and once more concentrating the common intelligence on me, gave utterance to ; the commotion reaching its highest point when Patty Ferret, the ratcatcher's wife—a lady whose reason was, under ordinary circumstances, the slave of an impetuous temper, and who, on the present occasion, was infuriated by my infernal yells—sprung out upon me from the dense crowd of spectators, and having seized me by both shoulders, shook me to and fro with such energy, that my teeth produced a melody similar to that of castanets handled by a skilful player. Nor was my tormentor satisfied with this manual violence, but during the whole time that she was employed, to use her own expressive language, in “shucking me

till I rottled like an ottomi," she gave vent to the agitation of her feelings in a harangue that in some respects will bear comparison with the most admired specimens of classic oratory—"yar little divel, yar earth warm, yar cunning mole, is this the way yar trit yer father's best friend, who knowed him long afore he ever took to evil ways, and even now ain't ashamed to come and drop yar a word o' comfort, although he died a murderer, and you're, I dare bet a penny, an accomplish to the agressories after the fact. Harn't you been a scandal to the whole village, and don't every child o' mother born for three miles round pray not to be led into yar evil courses? Didn't yar steal the fruit off Mary Mather's gooseberry bushes? and didn't yer only eight months since stone my husband's dog, and call him names, and fleer on him as he rode past, speaking to no man, on his jackass? Then

stop yer blaring, yar wretched brat o' a mud-derer, and demean yersel' like a Christeean gal to yer betters."

What would have become of me if Mrs. Ferret had been allowed to have her own way, it is impossible to say; most probably she would have shaken my heart into my head, and my head into my heels, and so have made an end of me in a jumble. But fortunately Susan Latchett came on the scene, and rescued me. She was the honest wife of an honest peasant, frank in her language, gentle in her nature, and conciliating in her aspect. God bless thee, Susan Latchett, and thy offspring to all generations, for the tenderness with which you cheered me in my gloomy childhood, and the noble courage with which you defended the memory of my poor father.

"Martha Ferret, cease ye abusing that poor child, as you yourself have children who may one day stand in need of man's mercy as well

as God's," thus did Susan begin, and at her words Mrs. Ferret fell back from me scared into quiet, and the rest of the assembly held their tongues in silence to listen to Susan Latchett's words.

"Neighbours," proceeded that honest creature, "you are all kindly women, and ill would the mortal hear from me who dared speak ill of you, for I have received help from your hands in the times of trouble, and there is no one here that I don't know more good of than I could put into words. Don't then do aught uncouth to this poor child; for you've feeling hearts, and it will sorrow you to look back on your conduct if you do. She is one o' us, and so was the dead man; they both ate and drank one poverty with us; and hard will be the times when the poor give over standing by each other! A terrible accident has happened, and blood has been shed. But it ain't in me to condemn any who are already

before the judgment seat of God. Nor will I be so presumptuous as to defend any. But serious, and as wishing the Almighty to judge me by my truth, I say I cannot believe Roger Copley committed murder, at least with intent. He had his faults, and they were hardly punished, indeed over severely; and he got hard words from those who had better gi'en him kind ones; but it is no more than scant justice to say that he was far better than his reputation. He had a tender womanish heart, and he would have been happier had the Lord who made him given him a stronger body or a less flearing wit. He *said* much that was wrong, and *did* much that was good; and though folks talked enough of the first, they ne'er spent breath on the second. Patty Ferret, when your sister, Joe Mattock's wife (may her soul be happy!), died of the fever, and her six children were like to have followed her out of sheer want of proper food and nursing, who

brought them bread, and meat screwed out of his own hard earnings? Roger Copley. It was a bitter night when he brought the bottle of brandy to the sick room! He was a drunkard, may be,—but to pay for that bottle of brandy he lived on bread and drank nought but water for a month! There's many a one, fair-spoken of, who'll play the helpless foul; but Roger Copley, with all his bad repute, ne'er wronged a living creature but himself. But now he is gone from us;—and may God deal with him with pitifulness! and as for this poor girl—this orphan child—if she'll trust me, and call on me to do the part of a mother, out of the good-will I bear and always bore the dead man who begot her, she shall be welcome to sup and bite with my childer, and a tender mother she shall always find me."

Orators of the pulpit, embryo Ludships of the bar, glib gentlemen of the senate, noisy ranters of the hustings, if you want to become

masters of your art, condescend sometimes to listen to the street-corner and wayside gossipings of the poor. I have heard in my time the fluent rhetoric and polished invective of many who have talked themselves out of starvation and garret obscurity up to the rank and pay of cabinet ministers, but they all failed to stir me as I have at times been stirred by the rude eloquence of ill-clad, untaught wranglers in the recesses of dingy markets, where outcast has spoken to outcast, not for lucre, but for sympathy.

When Susan Latchett ceased, there was not a dry eye or a heart unsoftened in the room. Swayed by one strong impulse, the women closed round me with a thousand grotesque assurances of affection and good-will. "You're a right good woman, and better than the parsons," exclaimed sturdy Mrs. Seagrim, with a cordial intonation. And as for Patty Ferret—blubbering hysterically and running

from one extravagance of speech and gesture to another, she averred that Susan was the best woman on the face of the earth, and that she herself would die sooner than hurt a hair of my head.

Rising from the ground with my heart swelling with emotions of gratitude till it nearly choked me, and with my eyes swimming with honest tears, I threw myself into Susan Latchett's maternal arms, and was on the point of telling, without miscolouring or reserve, the entire story of the previous night. How different might the after part of my life have been had I acted on this resolve ! But at the very moment when my tide of communicativeness was about to set in, there was a stir among my auditors, and an air of perplexity—even of consternation—came over their faces. “ It's Master Haggart,” flew through the assembly in whispers ; and forthwith returned Joel Haggart, dressed in his

usual costume, and wearing his customary appearance, except that an increased light of vigilance and cunning made his eyes look more wary, unscrupulous, and cruel than ever. A chill crept through me as I beheld him; and yet so powerful an influence had that hateful being gained over me in the course of the last twenty-four hours, that I removed my clasped arms from Susan Latchett's neck, and advanced a few paces to give him greeting.

“The heat o’ the day to you, my friends,” commenced Joel Haggart, with a grin of amazing politeness; “it’s kind and neighbour-like in you to put yourselves out of the way-to come and cheer me now that I am worried in this most annoying matter. Hope you are well, Mrs. Seagrim. How does your shop get on? Taking care of itself, ay? and charging double, so that it mayn’t suffer in your absence? And you, too, Patty Ferret,

I am glad to see you; and when you go home again, *if* you mean *ever* to go home again, just tell your husband that he don't keep my rats and moles down as he ought, and that if he don't look sharp, come Christmas, I shall say, 'no cure, no pay.' Hallo, skulemaster, you here? Do these dames here pay you a penny a-week for neglectin' to eddicate their children? If so be, yours must be a pleasant business. The top of health to you, too, clerk, and may you have strength to mind your own business, and dig with judgment a grand grave for Master Purvey—seven foot by three and a-half."

Great was the power Joel Haggart wielded over all he came in contact with. On the present occasion the force of his will was signally displayed. The bold confident garrulity of the women ceased, and many of them in sheer affright rose and slunk away; those who were brave enough to hold their

ground for a time looked sheepish and crestfallen, and as Joel persevered in his sneers and bitter comments, they writhed under his sarcasms, and turned pale with impotent rage and a sense of defeat. One by one they [rose and slipped away, until the entire assembly had vanished, like snow before a vernal sun, with the exception, however, of Susan Latchett. She was brave in her goodness and singleness of purpose; and it struck me that even Joel Haggart, as he eyed her askance, mitigated somewhat the effrontery and harshness of his demeanor.

“Miriam, your master naturally doesn’t like such a crowd on his premises immediately after the unpleasant occurrences of last night, and I myself had some doubts as to whether I would come where I knew there would be so many. But since I am here, I don’t like the thoughts of leaving without taking you with me. You can’t remain here alone, child,

with all the horrors that will come upon you."

This address of invitation was made as much to Joel Haggart as myself, and he relieved me from the difficulty of a reply by saying :—

" Susan Latchett, you are a good woman, and unlike the crowd who swarmed here out of curiosity, and I would let you do exactly as you list—either keep here with the child or take the child with you—but at present I must be cautious. In an hour's time, the constables will be here to collect evidence, and I and Miriam must help them in every way in our power ; for it is a life and death matter—two lives have been already lost, and the law, as in duty bound, will make a strict search after all instigators and accomplices to the awful crime. So I think you will say that 'tis better for all parties that, till Miriam and I have been before, and given our 'davits to,

the justices, you and she should not be together. She will give her evidence more straight and unconfused if she have not talked the matter over backwards and forwards: and in case she should break down, it had better not be in people's mouths to say that you put wrong notions into her head."

Though Joel said this civilly and even deferentially, his voice was firm and decided, and allowed no doubt to remain in Susan's mind as to his wish and resolve. She was expected forthwith to depart, and leave him alone with me; and as she had no means of effectual resistance, and moreover as she was compelled to recognise a certain show of reason in the arguments advanced in favour of her absenting herself, she rose and took her leave—reluctantly, but without offence.

"I'll step down to you in the morning, Susan Latchett, and tell you if anything new happens. If I do, you wont gossip about it,

I knows," remarked Joel, in a most conciliatory manner.

"Thank you, sir; I shall be anxious to hear," responded Susan, and she passed over the threshold.

She was no sooner out of sight than Joel Haggart walked into the garden and round the cottage, seeing if the ground was really clear of spies and eaves-droppers. The result of his investigations proving satisfactory, he returned into the dwelling, and after scanning me deliberately and with searching glances, he commenced his verbal examination.

Will the reader be shocked or surprised that, ere he asked me his first question, I had determined to tell truth, half-truth, no truth, and direct falsehood, just as it answered my purpose? Children reared under the influence of fear are admirable liars. And the memory of Joel Haggart's amiable suggestion, made only the day before, of disciplining me with

maple rods, warned me that I had better not let him know that I had acted as a spy on his movements.

“Tell me, Miriam, little girl, all that happened here yesterday after I left your father, and gave him some money for his last week’s wages?” Joel observed, with a kind and reassuring tone that startled and comforted me, and yet did not prevent my noticing that it was his pleasure to speak of the donation of the crown-piece as payment for work done, and not as a gift or bribe.

I obeyed, and narrated without falsification, and with every attention to minutiae, the events of the preceding day—how father had bought bread, and cheese, and drink in the village, how we had dined and supped, how I had fed the pigs, and finally how I had gone to bed.—Had I seen anything of my father after that?—Yes, he had come upstairs and kissed me in bed, and then he went down

again and went out.—Oh! had I seen him since then?—No.

Joel now left me for a few minutes, and went down the yard to the piggery, the members of which society had so completely vanished from my mind, that it only then occurred to me that they had been fasting all the day.

When Joel had made the round of the hog-yard, shed, and bottom of the garden, he came back, and again fixing his keen cruel eyes on me, enquired sternly why the hogs had not been fed.

Scarcely able to speak above my breath, I answered :—

“Oh, sir, I forgot them. I am only just up.”

“How? only just up?”

“I was very tired, and I slept till the people came and woke me.”

“What made you tired?”

"I don't know."

"Where are your shoes?"

"Upstairs."

"Go—and fetch them. No, stay—I'll go up with you, and look at the bedroom. Come on. You go up first—and I will follow."

As soon as we entered the apartment, his quick eye ran over every spot of the floor, walls, and furniture.

"Umph! he didn't use his bed last night, and you did yours, that's clear. Trunk? trunk locked? what's in it?—never mind." And so he went on with a mutter between his teeth—when he suddenly changed his tone, and startled me by exclaiming in a sharp tone, "Haigh! those shoes are covered with mud—how comes that?"

"The ground is muddy."

"Ah! but the rain did not come on till after you were in bed, according to your

account, and there was no mud yesterday, and you have not been out to-day."

I trembled, as he, hissing like a serpent, clutched me to him with a grasp of iron, and subjected me to another scrutiny.

"And your frock is draggled with mud—so is your petticoat, you little hussy; you have been telling me lies."

"I have not."

"You went out after the rain came on last night."

"I did not."

"It's no good your trying to deceive me. The justices will make you tell a different story."

"They wont."

"They'll make you."

"They can't. They may drag me to pieces—but what I've said is true, and I wont tell a lie to please anyone."

I saw clearly that the obstinacy with which

I persisted in my falsehood did not impose on Joel Haggart's shrewd understanding ; I knew well that he was thoroughly alive to the fact of my intention to deceive him ; but something also told me that he would be well satisfied with my lie—indeed, would like it better than the truth—if I would only be firm in maintaining it when questioned by the magistrates. He regarded me in silence, as a gamester may be supposed to regard the table on which he has staked his last gold pieces—warily, distrustfully, eagerly, and with a desperate resolve to be calm.

“Where's your father, now?”

“I don't know.”

“What's happened to him?”

“He is killed—shot dead.”

“Where was he killed?”

“At Melton Stubbs.”

“How did it happen?”

“He was with the poachers, and the game-keeper killed him.”

“Ay—and he shot the gamekeeper.”

“He didn’t—he couldn’t. How could he kill the keeper when he was already dead?”

“Who *told* you all this? ay?” exclaimed Joel Haggart, with the fierce glare of a tiger in his eyes, and a return of the hateful rattle in his throat. Again he had detected me.

Promptly, and without hesitation, I answered, “Susan Latchett. She was talking of it just now, with the other women, and she said she wouldn’t believe father committed a murder.”

As I made this reply, it crossed my childish brain, how dangerous and peculiar the ground was on which I stood, and that notwithstanding all the hubbub, and tumult, and clatter of the morning, no one had thought to inform me of the particulars of my father’s death, and that had I not known them from being an eye-witness of the catastrophe, I should not even then have been acquainted with the barest outline of the facts.

"I hope, for your sake, Miriam," observed Joel Haggart, calmly, but with the rattle still in his throat, "that what you say is true; for mark me!—if you are found to have had any hand in this business, even to the looking on at the fray, you'll be taken to Clumford jail, and—YOU'LL BE HUNG!!!"

I heard him with a shudder, and fully believed him.

He waited several seconds without speaking, so that silence should render his words more impressive; and then, with a voice altered almost to its usual tone, he said:—"But don't stand idle there. Idleness is a bad thing for little girls. Put on your shoes and get your little spade, and come out and dig the potatoe-bed."

I of course obeyed with alacrity, and soon I was hard at work turning up the wet soil. Without rebuking me further for neglecting to feed the hogs, Joel went off and attended to

them himself. That business done, he returned, and stood in a musing attitude, scanning me from under his knit brows. It did not occur to me that his solicitude about the tillage of the potatoe-ground was to be remarked on; it never struck me that he could have any object to serve in making me cover my shoes, and draggle my petticoats with *wet* mud. Nor, though it vaguely glimmered upon me that I was about to play, as a mere puppet in the hands of an unscrupulous man, a terrible part in a desperate game, was I able to realize the exact nature of my position with regard to my companion. And yet, child though I was, I might, one would think, have seen, as I afterwards did see, that the man pierced through the thin veil of my deceit, and was well assured by my prevarications, contradictions, lies, muddy boots, sodden clothes, aspect of fatigue, trembling limbs, and slumber prolonged till past mid-day, that I had spent the previous

night in watching my father, and consequently in being a spy on him, that I knew *he had committed murder*, and that his only chance of escaping an ignominious death on the gallows was in his securing my secrecy till legal enquiry had been baffled, and then in removing me from all temptation or power to reveal that which, when discovered, would bring swift destruction on him.

Cunning, quick-witted, precociously clever though I was, still I was only a poor ignorant child, and all my ideas with regard to the social arrangements of life were necessarily confused and shadowy. The law and justice I conceived of dimly as rich ladies and gentlemen empowered to punish poor people for doing wrong with whips, prisons, and the gallows. Murder I knew to be a terrible crime,—invariably punished with death. And such was my mental perplexity, that I could not, in reflecting on the affray and murder,

72 regard myself as otherwise than guilty in the eye of the law of all the violence done. The distinction between a mere spectator and an actor was beyond me. I reasoned that it was law and justice on the one side, *versus* poachers on the other; *we* poachers had murdered a man,—and my neck was in danger. That was law. Had not Joel Haggart told me so?

“You must be hungry,” observed Joel, when I had dug enough to answer his purpose, “for doubtless you forgot to feed yourself as well as the hogs. Go and eat something.”

Availing myself of this merciful permission with alacrity, for I was faint with inanition, I hastened to the cottage, and was speedily munching bread and cheese, and slaking my thirst with water. But it was not till I had consumed a liberal allowance of victuals that I recognised how much I had needed the support of food. With the ravenous greed of a

young wolf I continued to eat, swallowing as much and thinking as little as possible; and so engrossed did I become with the pleasant occupation that it was almost with a start of surprise I saw, on raising my eyes from my plate, Joel Haggart once more by my side, and heard him repeat his valuable piece of legal information, in the same harsh rattling tone as he had before imparted it to me in.

“Little girl, I have been thinking about you; and I must say things look against you. But you know best whether your story is true. I hope it is. For your sake I hope it is. If what you have told me is right, you are all safe, and have nothing to fear. But if you had anything to do with your father’s business last night—you will be taken to Clumford—
AND YOU’LL BE HUNG!!!”

CHAPTER V.

MY FIRST MISTRESS.

THE whole country was in a state of alarm, horror, and intense enjoyment ; for few events create such real happiness in a country district as a murder. Next to cases of death by violence, flagrant instances of clerical immorality in dealing with the fair sex or the contents of the *poor* box afford the liveliest sensations of delight to a rustic population ; but a scandal in the Church is a far less acceptable occurrence

than a deliberate and fatal attack on human life. On the present occasion, there were numerous minor circumstances that contributed to invest the crime with singular charms. The fact of the murdered keeper having left behind him a sickly wife and six young children, totally unprovided for, and the general reputation my poor father had achieved as a drunkard, and one totally unprepared for entrance on another world, tended greatly to enhance the merits of the affray. The upper classes became quite excited about the horrible vices of the lower orders. Some were of opinion that public affairs were tending to a general state of revolution and anarchy ; some urged that *it* — (what *it* signified did not exactly appear) — was owing either to Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, or to the general licentiousness of the press ; some wanted to have the penalties of the game-laws increased, and have it forbidden by public

enactment for any man to have a gun in his possession, unless he was a gentleman's game-keeper, or had an estate in hand worth 600*l.* per annum ; the ladies of the county were generally of opinion that the time was come when "decided measures" were imperatively called for, and trusted that their husbands would suspend the *habeus corpus* act, and teach the populace in plain unmistakable terms that no one could insult the British Constitution with impunity. Every one trusted that some one would be hung. There was a subscription started for the family of the wounded keeper, to which several of the neighbouring squires put down their names for a guinea, and Joel Haggart appended his bluff signature for 5*l.* ; "for" observed that exquisite moralist, "have I not been to a certain extent instrumental in bringing that poor family to misfortune, through keeping in my employ, and

consequently in the neighbourhood, such a worthless vagabond as that Roger Copley;" and this sentiment, together with the liberal subscription, being carried by rumour through the neighbourhood, brought Joel a large return of praise, and orders for joints cut from his celebrated pigs. Certainly there were some bold enlightened individuals who expressed unmitigated disgust at this subscription, and were even rash enough to say that Mr. Joel Haggart need not be so anxious to connect his name with the affair, for in all human probability he would, ere long, be nailed to it ignominiously like a bat against a barn-door. And it is also unquestionable that some of the county magistrates winked and laughed insignificantly over their port at Joel's gushing burst of benevolence towards the widow and orphans; but they were content not to be too noisy or active; they did not want the game on *their* estates to

be troubled; and if Joel Haggart had in the back-ground been the real spoliator of the Burnham Estate, why, he had managed it very cleverly, and was, in acuteness, audacity, and courage, a rascal that did the entire community credit.

Still, it was necessary to make some inquiry into the affair, to come to some kind of judicial conclusion as to the fray and its instigators. There was a coroner's inquest held at the *Melton Oyster*, a public-house in a thinly-populated locality, and depending chiefly for its commercial success on transactions with the smugglers and the moral middle classes of that side of the county who liked French brandy best when they got it free of duty. To this court I was taken by the constable and my kind protector, Joel Haggart, who never left me alone, day or night, for so much as a couple of hours together; and I was examined by a red-faced gentleman (the coroner)

who alternately asked me questions in a very loud voice and took liberal gulps of brandy-and water with manifest relish. I have a very confused recollection of all that passed, save that I told a prodigious quantity of lies, and yet (although my credibility as a witness was irreparably damaged in the estimation of all present) never let out anything that gave my bibulous prosecutor the slightest inkling of the true state of the case. I remember the foreman of the jury (when my examination had terminated in casting doubt on every point of the case, except my own untruthfulness) stating it as his opinion, in plain and distinct terms, "that I was nothing better than the most thorough-paced and horriblest little warment that had ever been un-earthed." I remember that the coroner assented to this remark, and added in a very unctuous tone, "that it was horrible to find one so young with so slight a sense of moral responsibility." I re-

member also that the representatives of the British public who were crammed into the close, stifling little parlour, in which this free and open court was held, gave vent to various expressions of disgust; one aged lady even going so far as to say “that I had lied like a river of blasphemy, and that it was a wonder my teeth did not drop out.”—But more than these interesting facts I cannot now recall, except that a few hours afterwards, as Joel Haggart, *without* the constable, was driving me home, he told me I had behaved very well, that he thought I had for once saved my neck from a halter, and that the intelligent English jury had agreed to the following admirable verdict:—

“The jury, after careful investigation of the facts of the case, are of opinion that William Purvey and Roger Copley have been found dead; but which killed which, or whether any third party or accident killed either or both,

the jury are unable to determine ; but since William Purvey met his death in the performance of his duty, and Roger Copley had no business to be out of his bed, the jury find that William Purvey was wilfully murdered by Roger Copley, and that the said Roger Copley died immediately after by the visitation of God.—Moreover, the jury cannot separate without expressing their sorrow that the said Roger Copley is not at this present moment alive to hear the conclusion that has been come to.”

The coroner’s jury having thus probed the mystery to the bottom, public interest in the matter began to diminish. There was some expectation amongst the populace that the magistrates would do what was called “stir in the matter,” but the magistrates, having learnt by experience the difficulty of *stirring* in any important business without betraying what lame and impotent creatures they were,

deemed it better to *sit still*. They were the more encouraged to adopt this prudent line of inaction, by reflecting, firstly, that the coroner (who was a younger brother of a deputy-lieutenant for the county) would be annoyed if they reversed his finding; secondly, that they were not paid by the State, and consequently had nothing to gain or lose by the active or negligent discharge of their duties; and, thirdly, that it was always better to let "things settle down" and "storms blow over." But the good, easy, prudent fellows felt that an example ought to be made for the benefit of public morals, and to the end that an agricultural population should be zealous in fearing God and honouring the King. Had my father been alive, the thing would have been plain and straight enough; he would have been made an example of, suspended by the neck outside the county-jail. But, as he had died on the field of strife, the

exigencies of the case could not be met in that way. Luckily, one of the justices, whose ingenuity and sagacity caused him to be much looked up to in the district, hit on a plan of extracting as much salutary influence out of my father's corpse as could ever have been jerked out of his neck when alive. It was clear, argued this gentleman, that Roger Copley had met his death by wilfully and unlawfully doing that which was likely to end in his destruction; hence his death was a consequence of his own act; and the man whose death was the consequence of his own deliberate act (of course, it was quite unnecessary to enter on any refined arguments about "intention") was guilty of suicide. *Ergo*, Roger Copley was a suicide—and he must take the consequences of having killed himself by putting up with an ignominious grave. With great applause this ingenious suggestion was accepted and acted upon; and Roger

Copley, to scare mankind from evil ways and make them love virtue and the game-laws, was buried, ten feet underground, at four crossways, with a stake driven through his body. And to give zest to this treatment of the unsightly slough of that unfortunate and abused wretch, a gibbet was erected over his tomb, and from it was suspended a dead cat!

Throughout the days of excitement, I was continually under the eye of Joel Haggart. The villagers never came up to the cottage; for my master, as I found out afterwards, had given them to understand that he would resent it if they dared to hang about his premises. When I was a witness at the coroner's inquest, and on the occasions when I was carried before a neighbouring magistrate to be examined by the wife of the said magistrate, Joel Haggart was my companion. It was his game never to let me out of his sight. He did not treat me unkindly, or with gentleness; he

never allowed himself to betray for one second that he wanted me to adopt a particular line of conduct ; he neither caressed nor menaced me, but contented himself with hovering round me, and cutting me off from all intercourse with my neighbours. Every night Joel slept on my father's truckle-bed, while I divided the hours between slumber and wakefulness on my own mattress in the corner. Once, I remember, when it was dark, so that it was not possible to see one's fingers, and as I lay coiled up under my counterpane, there came upon my ear a smart tap against the window, as if the glass had been struck by a minute pebble thrown by a person on the outside. Listening with strained attention I heard a scratching against the thin wall at my head, and I heard, or fancied I heard, a voice in the garden call stealthily to me—

“Miriam!—Miriam!”

In an instant I slipped out of bed and

glided like a mouse to the window, but, ere I could touch the sill, a strong hand clutched my shoulder, and I was flung with great force across the chamber and against the opposite wall. The person who paid me this courtesy was Joel, and he also relieved me of the trouble of responding to my visitor by opening the window himself and taking the interview on his own hands.

“Who’s there?” he whispered, as if afraid of waking some one.

“I—it’s I—Susan Latchett!” was answered in the same tone.

“And what are you doing here at this time of night, Susan?”

“I want to see Miriam. Why do you keep her so close?”

“Hush!—not so loud—you’ll wake her! What do you want with her?”

“I want to know how she gets on—to see her—to ask her if she would like to come

home to me, now it is all settled with the magistrates."

"Susan Latchett, you are a good soul—but it's a queer time of night to be out on such an errand as this. I'll be down and talk with you to-morrow—which will be Sunday. Come Monday, Miriam is going to leave here, and going to service. She has got a capital place, and a good mistress. But good night now, and go home; I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

He closed the window and returned to his resting-place without saying a word to me, who, having again crept between the sheets, now occupied myself with meditating on the wonderful piece of intelligence I had received. I had got a mistress then—a place at service. Thoughts of the workhouse and starvation had already troubled my little brain since my father's death, and it was with a sensation of relief from an oppressive apprehension of mis-

fortune, as well as with pride, that I heard that I was forthwith to be a lady's servant. My romantic nature was stirred within me. Of course my future mistress was a lady. I wondered if she was beautiful, kind, rich—and had all the other enviable qualities Roger Copley had always assured me my mistress should have. How strange of Mr. Haggart not to tell me of the arrangement that had been made for me—of the good fortune that had befallen me! Of course it was good fortune—and I glided from the bliss of conscious hope into a land of happy dreams.

The next morning—it was Sunday—just twelve days since the occasion of my receiving my neighbours who came to condole with me on the loss of my parent—and as I sat devouring a bowl of bread and milk for my breakfast, Joel Haggart condescended to inform me of the change that had taken place in my prospects.

“Oh! I am so glad, Mr. Haggart — so much obliged to you. I shall get on now,” I exclaimed, my eyes meanwhile glistening with emotion as I looked up at my benefactor.

“Well, I am glad to see you pleased, Miriam,” responded Joel Haggart, benevolently, “and you have reason to be. Your mistress is such a one as it don’t fall to every gal’s lot to get. She’s a sweet lady, and if you only try to do your duty, she’ll never part with you.”

“Is she pretty, Mr. Haggart?”

“A beauty, my dear.”

“And does she dress splendid, sir?”

“Ah! don’t she? If I was to try and tell you all the fine things she has in her boxes, my tongue would be seized with a palsy from being inadequate to the subject. I know a young woman who was her maid last year, and has left the place only to be married to a young man, and she tells me that whenever

she had done her work at all better than ordinary, she'd give her sticks of barley-sugar, and speak to her so kind, and sometimes even kiss her."

"Oh! I'll never leave her, Mr. Haggart!" I exclaimed in a rapture of devotion.

"Take care you don't try to leave her," replied Joel, with a return of his disagreeable rattle.

When the afternoon came, Joel told me that he was going away for a couple of hours or so, but that he should certainly return to take his tea at five o'clock.

When he left me, I found myself once more alone, after having been, without a single break of more than five minutes, in his presence for so many days. It was with a feeling of great relief that I turned round and reflected that I should be sole governess of my own actions, at least for two hours.

What should I do with myself, my liberty,

and my time? The sun was shining cheerfully, and a fresh dancing breeze brought up from the village the music of the church-bells chiming for the people to assemble for their afternoon devotions. It would be a pleasant change to go to church—to see all the people, and to be seen. And how should I array myself? Instantly the vision of the magnificent raiment contained in the box upstairs flashed across my mind, and I drew from its hiding place in my dress the key which I had taken from my father's pocket as he lay dead by the roadside, and which I had ever since guarded as a concealed treasure.

Some of my readers may possibly feel a curiosity to know in what character I first acquired the possession of that key—whether as a thief, or regarding myself in the light of heiress to all my father's possessions. Honestly, I am unable to say. Doubtless cupidity inspired me to thrust my hand into his pocket

and carry off the key ; but it is a question of uncertainty to me, whether, had I been detected in the act, I should either have admitted it to be, or regarded it as, a dishonest performance. If I could satisfy myself I was actuated by the same motives, unrestrained or unsupported by principle, which induce a pick-pocket to clutch at a purse, I should not hesitate to say so ; for I have a perverse pleasure in letting the world know all the contemptible traits of my character, and am moreover convinced that it is good policy to make oneself appear rather worse than one really is, for by so doing it is effected—firstly, that we enjoy a very considerable security from being unmasked and held up to odium for hypocrisy ; and, secondly, that we are much praised and admired for our candour and freedom from humbug, while all the time we lose nothing in the estimation of good people who save themselves from any chance

of thinking too well of their neighbours by believing them capable of all evil.

Anyhow, I had the key in my hand, and with it, ere many seconds had elapsed, I opened the box, and dressed myself to the best of my ability with its contents. It was true I could not wear most of the articles from their being made for a woman, whilst I was only a little girl ; but the bonnet and crimson shawl I made subservient to purposes of decoration ; and very proud of myself, my gorgeous dress, and my liberty was I as I scudded along, between a run and a walk, down the hill and in the direction of the church. My object was to astonish the children ; and I *did* astonish them, but not exactly in the way I intended.

I could count on my fingers the number of times I had been to church during the whole course of my life ; for my poor father, though he taught me my catechism and how to read the Bible, was opposed to the ecclesiastical

institutions of his country—at least of his parish, and did not like me to accompany his neighbours to the place of orthodox worship. But for this, I should have often visited the church, which had always appeared to me as an agreeable place of re-union, where people wore their best things, listened to music, and wondered what the parson was talking about. And now my vain little heart prompted me to achieve distinction in this assembly.

It was late—indeed the sermon had been begun—when I entered, and minced up with steps of infinite self-satisfaction to a vacant bench opposite those on which the children of the Sunday School were ranged. Of course I did not deign to take a place with *them*. I was not a school-child, but a young woman—whose father had died in a distinguished manner, and who was herself already hired as lady's-maid! Whether they read this disdain in my face, or whether it was only the comical aspect of my

huge bonnet and crimson shawl trailing on the ground that caused them to entertain sentiments of derision towards me, I cannot say ; but, certain it is, that immediately I took my seat, they commenced tittering and giggling. My dignity was sorely offended, and my pride cruelly wounded. It was some satisfaction to me to witness the operations of two men with long black wands in their hands, who strove to discharge efficiently their duty of keeping the boys (some five-and-twenty urchins) in order. Every time a boy giggled, one of these officials gave him a whack on the head with his wand—ay, at last, one, two, three, four whacks for each burst of tittering. But this energetic treatment was altogether unequal to the occasion. The merriment of the boys could not be suppressed. The wands knew no rest, and the noise they made, clattering on the boys' heads, can be compared only to a legion of billiard balls rushing frantically

for the same pocket. It was wonderful, too, the difference of the sounds which were produced by the concussions. Sometimes the notes were clear and sharp, and at other times dull and without any ring. I tried to account for this, and wondered whether it was the shape of the head, or the nature of its contents, or the direction in which the wand descended, or all these causes combined, that caused this difference of reverberation.

So great was the disturbance, the clergyman had some difficulty in continuing his sermon. At length, however—at *great* length—he got through it, and after the customary evening hymn dismissed the congregation, who soon crowded out into the churchyard, where a considerable assembly, composed of all the children and people of the poorer sort, pressed round me with an uproar that is indescribable.

“The little wretch !”

“Where did she get the things?”

“She stole ’em.”

“Anyhow, she did not buy them.”

“A *crimson* shawl, indeed.”

“It’s dyed with the gamekeeper’s blood.”

“Oh! would I be a murderer’s daughter!”

Such yells, shrieks, and exclamations of fury here ensued, that I was truly grateful when I saw Joel Haggart push his way through the crowd and appear upon the scene. The assembly was much larger than the one he had quelled a few days before, and, moreover, it was not gathered together on his ground; so, instead of attacking the bystanders with sarcasm or menace, he prudently took a firm hold of my wrist, and led me away without a word. No one followed, but as I quitted the outskirts of the crowd, I heard Susan Latchett say, in a tone of touching commiseration:—

“Poor orphan child! ’tis the bonnet and shawl her mother was married in!”

I thought Joel Haggart would scold me for my foolish conduct, but he did not. When it was his humour the man could be calm, as well as he could be ferocious and sullen.

The next morning, at an early hour, a gentleman came to the cottage, and asked me some questions in the presence of Joel Haggart. This visitor inquired if I wished to go out to service, and whether I was ready to go and live as a little maid, twenty miles away, in the employment of one Mrs. Muscut. My replies were those of cordial assent, and having noted them down in an official-looking little notebook, my interrogator wished me luck, and went his way, having first nodded to Joel Haggart, and told him with a grim smile, that when she came for me Mrs. Muscut might *have me*.

An hour or more passed after this visit, and then there appeared at the garden gate a square cart, in which was harnessed a stout

clumsy pony, which was driven by a strong, hard-featured woman, who bore a strong resemblance to Joel Haggart. Painted on the back of the vehicle, in large letters, was the following inscription:—"Daniel Muscut, Farmer and Higgler." Descending from the cart, the woman eyed me sharply, and nodded to Joel Haggart, who greeted her cordially as his sister, and energetically avowed that there never was a woman like her. And he spoke truly, for, in appearance, there never was, I should say, another woman so stern and forbidding; and her nature did not belie her aspect.

"Yes, Joel," she replied harshly to the greeting, "I am here to do your bidding, and drag you, as I best may, out of the mess. So, this is your helpmate! a pretty confederate! You, Joel Haggart, to go leaguering yourself with a miserable brat like that! You're a born babe, and one day you'll be hoisted up,

and I shan't be able to come nigh you to cut you down.—Mark my words.”

“Don't you flurry yourself, sister Anne; I am an old bird, and have more lives than a cat. But will you take anything after your morning drive?”

“Yes,” she responded snappishly, “yes—that gal—and the sooner the better.”

“Your pony don't look tired.”

“No, I rested and baited at ‘The Pile of Bricks,’ so there is no need for me to loiter. We must be off. Now, child” (turning suddenly on me), “get yourself ready—quick.”

“Are you going to take me to my mistress?” I asked timidly.

She started, and inquired, with an exclamation that sounded wondrous like a curse, “What I meant by that?”

As she spoke, she shot so terrible a glance at me, that I could not answer her; but Joel

came to my relief by saying something quickly to his sister, that I could not hear, although it was uttered in a tone above a whisper.

The explanation, whatever it was, had the effect of composing Mrs. Muscut's excitement, for she changed her tone, and said in a matter-of-fact manner, that she had been sent by my mistress to fetch me, and that I must put on my bonnet and prepare instantly for a journey several miles across the country. Whatever fears had begun to find growth in my mind were quieted by this assurance; and, with a vague notion that Joel Haggart's sister was a trusted but very disagreeable servant of the charming mistress into whose service I was about to enter, I took my seat in the market-cart, timid and startled, but not dispirited.

Just as we were on the point of starting, it struck me that I should like to have a brief interview once more with Susan Latchett, before quitting the scenes of that childhood on

which she had expended so much kindness. Acting on this feeling, I inquired of Mrs. Muscut if she would be so good as to drive by the way of Susan's cottage, and stop at the door for a minute.

"Whar is this woman the brat talks of?" inquired Mrs. Muscut of her brother, with a growl that did not tend to give me a more favourable impression of her character.

"She is a *busy* woman, sister Anne,—and she is very fond of her."

"Oh! oh!—she is a busy woman; that's bad! And she is fond of her—that is wuss."

"She has been very good to me, Mrs. Muscut—and she took care of me when I was very little and had no mother," said I, with courageous artifice, throwing into my voice an earnestness and pathos that are found nowhere beyond the regions of childhood and opera-boxes.

“She had better have wrung your neck,” returned Mrs. Muscut, drily.

There was no good to be attained in urging my petition ; so I held my tongue in silence, and restrained within my breast the rising emotions of disappointment and anger that nearly choked me. In obedience to Joel’s directions, the cart was driven through a broken and circuitous by-lane, that diverged from the main road at the bottom of the hill, leaving the village and Susan Latchett’s cottage on the left.

It was a long and memorable journey. The weather was bitterly cold for the time of the year, the wind whistling sharply about my ears, and a raw mist, that ever bordered on the quality of downright rain, chilling my slight face, and tiny hands, and uncovered ancles. We travelled slowly, for the pony, a stout rather than a mercurial creature, declined stirring one inch more than five

miles an hour. By mid-day I was very weary of the journey, and had exhausted all the means my ingenuity suggested of whiling away the time. I sought amusement in scanning Mrs. Muscut's face—stern, deeply lined, and repellent as to features, selfish and stolidly brutal as to expression. She looked considerably over fifty, but no sign of feebleness or decay was visible in her weather-beaten visage. Neither to the right nor to the left did she look; it was only now and then that she deigned to glance at me, and on those occasions her eyes were anything but pleasant and reassuring; her face was set forwards with an air of stoical endurance; such as certain popular engravings inform us Napoleon's wore, as he rode his mule over the snow-encrusted mountains. At one time I wished she would relieve the monotony of our progress by talking, but the following brief passage of conversation inclined

me to change my mind, and hope for a continuance of the silence that ensued.

“What are you chattering so for?”

“I can’t help it, ma’am; my teeth wont keep still. I am so very cold.”

“I ain’t cold. I have two shawls on under my cloak, and a rug over my legs. I ain’t cold.”

“Might I put that sacking over me that lies at the back of the cart, ma’am? I think I could make myself warm with it.”

“If you dare to touch it, I’ll give you a taste of Tommy, and mark you like a zebra.”

Tommy, I shortly afterwards learnt, was the short stout dog-whip, with which, ever and anon, the stalwart woman whacked the fat sides and haunches of her pony.

Three times in the course of our prolonged drive, Mrs. Muscut stopped at houses of entertainment, where provision for horse and man was offered for a modest consideration. On

each of these occasions Mrs. Muscut refreshed her own person and that of her steed, the former with ale and gin mixed, and the latter with water and a handful of oats; but I was not supposed to stand in need of any such support. Moreover, as the afternoon began to wear on, Mrs. Muscut took from a basket a store of bread and cheese, and, allowing the pony to lag at foot pace up a long hill-range, ate heartily and with much relish; but she never offered me any portion of her repast.

“You’re hungry,” she observed, when she had consumed the last morsel of her stock of food. “I’ll be bound, now, you are very hungry. I should not wonder, now, if you have got quite an appetite.”

“I am hungry, ma’am.”

“Well, I’ll stop while you get out of the cart, and pick a Swede turnip out of that field. A raw turnip ain’t such a bad thing for an empty belly.”

The pangs of inanition were upon me; a cruel cramp had for several minutes been playing with the internal muscles and coats of my stomach; and I was really grateful for this permission to stay the gnawing torture with a stolen meal that a sheep would have taken as its right. I climbed the gate, plucked from the ground the largest turnip I could see, and brought it back with me, top and all, to the cart. But I had no sooner again seated myself behind the pony, that, on an allusion to Tommy, proceeded to make valiant use of its limbs, than I repented having so greedily selected so enormous a root. I had not a knife with which to cut it, and my little jaws were unable to gape wide enough to bite it with effect. This last straw broke down my courage, which had borne up against hunger, cold, and contumely, and, in the bitterness of my vexation, I burst into tears.

“Yar greedy, guzzling, little divvle—it

sarves you right!" observed my companion, who had watched my trouble with keen and satisfied eyes. "If you had not been such a little hog, you would have had nought to cry about. There, hold your row, or I'll come down on you, and give you a taste of Tommy, just to warm your blood, and put you in a better humour."

Terror-stricken, I managed to restrain my whining, but not to bring my tears and sobs to a period. But this was not enough to please Mrs. Muscut, who, though she, for the present, restrained herself from applying Tommy to my shoulders, snatched the turnip from my hands, and, grasping hold of the top, banged the root half-a-dozen times over my head and face, and then hurled it over her shoulder into the back of the cart, observing that it would do very well for my supper and spare her swill-tub.

"My missus," I cried indignantly, and

with the defiance of rebellion flashing in my eyes, "wont feed me on raw turnips. She's a kind lady, Mr. Haggart told me so. And if you strike me again, I'll tell her how you have treated me, and get you turned off."

Instead of exhibiting any fear or irritation at this threat, Mrs. Muscut relaxed the sternness of her aspect, and after a series of preliminary chuckles, burst into a long peal of heavy, harsh laughter. There was very little merriment in the noise she made, but a great deal of that savage ravenous delight with which a nearly famished wolf would pounce on a feeble kid.

"So you'll tell missus?" enquired Mrs. Muscut, when the more violent signs of her amusement had passed away; "you'll tell missus, will you?"

And this inquiry she renewed again and again, leering at me with a fiendish grin of mockery every time she repeated the question.

For one reason I did not object to her doing so, for at the word "missus," my thoughts reverted to the bright warm picture of beauty, splendour, and urbanity that I had formed in my imagination of my future mistress.

The time was wearing on to three o'clock in the afternoon, when we emerged from the district of small enclosures and high fences that we had spent the morning in traversing, and crossed over a bleak, barren heath, on which nothing save stumpy bushes of furze were able to grow; then we scraped and jerked our tardy way over a succession of smaller commons, each of which had a community of a dozen geese, a donkey, a few pigs, and a man standing staring into a dull black pond, as if meditating suicide; and after these bits of unreclaimed waste land, we entered on another heath, wider, wilder, blacker, and more appalling in its rugged desolation than any scene the terrors and goblins

of childhood had ever enabled me to conceive.

The wind was fresher and colder, and produced in my nerves, benumbed as they were, a novel and not unpleasurable sensation, but which caused my teeth to chatter more than before.

“Ah, yar colder,” observed Mrs. Muscut, with evident relish for my sufferings; “it is the sea-air yar feel, and yar’ll be colder still before I have done with yar.”

As she said this, far away at a remote corner of the heath, miles distant from any farm, or homestead, or church, rose to sight a cottage and a few sheds. I was debating what kind of people dwelt in such a habitation, placed in such an undesirable locality, and flanked by not one stick of tree, hedge, or timber of any kind, whereby the keen blasts of the east wind might be warded off, and I was wondering whether its inmates

were more wicked or miserable than those who dwelt in villages, near the voices and hearths of their fellow-men, when Mrs. Muscut broke in upon my musings by pointing with her whip to the object of my meditations, and gruffly informing me that it was to be my future home.

“What, ma’am, does my mistress live there?”

“Yes, she does.”

“What, ma’am, the nice lady Mr. Haggart told me about?”

“Yes, she does. The place is nice enough, ain’t it?”

A chill crept over me, as I vaguely recognised something of the true state of my position.

We drew nearer to the dwelling, and, as we did so, I found it to be larger than I had thought it was at first sight. From the number of its windows it clearly contained several

apartments, and it was considerably higher than the residences of the poor usually are, but over it, and before it, and on all sides of it were speaking signs of the savage nature of those who lived in it. The fence round the garden was broken down, the gate had dropped from its hinges and lay on the bank, fractured and fast mouldering into touchwood. Rank weeds, some of gigantic growth, and some creeping on the ground like noxious vermin, choked the paths, the beds, and the entire space of the garden. The tenement itself was sadly in need of repair, for places in the roof, from which tiles had dropped, were stuffed up with straw; in every window, paper did duty for glass, and if the wood-work of the structure had ever been painted, the brushes that were used in the operation must have perished before George the Third ascended the throne.

A meagre, bowed, palsied, crafty-looking old man opened the cottage door, and shamblled

down the path of the garden to give us greeting.

“Oh!—that’s she—the young warmint!” observed the venerable man, fixing a pair of keen eyes on me.

“That’s her, Dannell Muscut—and, trust me, if we use her sharp and feed her low, she’ll do us a good deal o’ work afore she die. Now get out—don’t sit there, as if the cart was your right place.”

These concluding words were addressed to me, and, by way of giving emphasis to them, Mrs. Muscut clutched hold of my clothes at my waist, and with a powerful grasp raised me up in her right hand as if I weighed no more than a cat, and flung me on the ground at Daniel Muscut’s feet like a bag of meal. The old man aided me to scramble to my feet, by giving me a kick with a boot which was of a much more substantial make than its wearer. My small person having thus been

temporarily disposed of, Mrs. Muscut proceeded to unload her cart of a hamper, two large baskets, and the sacking which I had in vain begged to be allowed to use as a protection against the inclement atmosphere. When these articles had all been taken from the cart and placed upon the ground, Daniel Muscut led off the pony and vehicle to a shed and stable that flanked the dwelling-house, and Mrs. Muscut, having ordered me to convey, with all proper care and dispatch, the luggage into the living-room of the cottage, moved off, to divest herself of her bonnet and wrappers, and prepare for the abundant meal it was my high privilege to see her soon afterwards take.

It was no easy task for my chilled fingers to carry the heavy baskets across the garden, but I managed to complete my task by the time Mrs. Muscut descended from her bedroom, relieved of her out-door gear.

“Then yar *har* brought em in, *har* yar?” remarked that amiable lady. “It is lucky for yar yar *har*. If yar had not, I would *har* set my old man on yar.”

At this instant Mrs. Muscut’s old man sham-bled into the apartment, which was furnished in the ordinary fashion of a peasant farmer’s dwelling room, and possibly interpreting Mrs. Muscut’s words as an order to commence action, he sidled over to me, and administered to me a succession of cuffs on the head and pinches on the arms. While paying me these hospitable attentions he did not utter any words of anger, or dislike, or pleasure; but his gray eyes twinkled amiably, as if he discerned a rich field of enjoyment opened to him in subjecting me to bodily torture. He was a remarkably taciturn being, not speaking twice in the four-and-twenty hours, unless it was to reply with the utmost brevity to his wife’s questions; but he never wearied of

listening to her observations on men and matters, and my delinquencies which, as I and the Muscuts became more intimate, afforded that lady an inexhaustible source of material for thought and pious ejaculation. At first, this habitual silence on the part of Mr. Muscut troubled me excessively. At the commencement of our acquaintance, when he sham-bled up to me, and began to pinch me, tweak my nose, nip my ears, and pull my hair, I used to implore him to inform me of the cause of his displeasure, so that I might conform to his wishes, and escape such disagreeable demonstrations of his ill-will ; but he would never answer a word, or indicate by any sign or sound that he heard my speech, unless the calm persistency with which he continued his petty tortures might be regarded as a proof that he heeded and was affected by my remonstrances.

On the present occasion he let me off easily, and took his seat at the table in the middle of

the room, on which a white cloth and knives and forks were spread, ready for the reception of a joint of pork, which Mrs. Muscut removed from the fire, where it had been roasting under the inspection of her husband. Soon the meal was commenced by my master and mistress, which latter personage, after she had taken the edge off her appetite, deigned to address me in the following considerate style:—

“ Don’t keep staring at me, you murderous little cat, but take off your bonnet, and eat a meal from that dish of fragments you’ll find in the sink in the corner. Eat your victuals there where you find ’em, and thank God for all his mercies. And mind, don’t you so much as turn your eye to look at me and my Dannell Muscut. A gal like you har no right to eye her betters,—and if I catch you doing it I’ll send a fire-pan at your head. And if you seem to me by your way of standing to be listening to what we talk about, I’ll just come

across the room and flay you with Tommy this blessed night, so that you may know who is going to be missus—you or me."

Obediently to the command, but not from any desire for food, I removed my bonnet and shawl, and went to the sink, whereon I found an old tin candle-box, containing scraps of mouldy bread, refuse meat, tea-leaves, bones, potato-peelings, and that very self-same turnip which I had pulled from the field and Mrs. Muscut had belaboured my head with an hour or so before. In all the poverty of my previous life, and often as I had gone supperless to bed, I had never before been commanded to eat a meal that would have scarce been fit for swine ; and now, faint though I was, from having consumed no food since my customary scant morning's breakfast, I was so nauseated with sight of the loathsome mess before me, that I could not find courage to devour a particle of it.

Too benumbed with terror to entertain any definite feelings of indignation to those who had kidnapped me, and proposed using me as a slave, I stood unconsciously turning over in my mind whatever scraps of Mrs. Muscut's talk to her husband reached my ears.

They were a singular contrast, that husband and wife; about as remarkable a couple as it has been my fate to observe. They were out of the common way for several reasons. There was at least twenty years' difference in their ages; Mrs. Muscut did all the talking, and Mr. Muscut all the listening; both of them were industrious, Mrs. Muscut as chief, Mr. Muscut, as subordinate, the latter never for one moment seeming to resent the superiority of the former, or indeed giving a thought to it. They never quarrelled with each other, and for years—indeed upwards of a quarter of a century—had led a most harmonious wedded life. She was tall, full of

figure, athletic, with a stern, stony face; he was slight, decrepid, with long attenuated features, an imbecile expression, and snowy locks that might have adorned a prophet. They were not indigent, nor did they stint themselves of the creature-comforts they had a fancy for. Their occupation was, as I shortly discovered, to rear and fatten poultry for Livermere market, and the trade they drove with their flocks of turkeys and geese, and their scores of other fowls, was a sufficiently flourishing one to permit of their indulging in the pleasures of eating and intoxication.

The evening meal of these two worthies went on slowly, and came to end without their deigning to take any notice of me. Mrs. Muscut, when the repast was finished, removed the edibles, and put them and the dishes into the pantry closet, without demanding my assistance. By herself she shortly afterwards

got out the tea-things, and made tea for herself and the silent Daniel. While bustling about on these household duties, she three times passed close by me, the skirt of her dress brushing against mine, but she gave me no heed ; apparently she was not aware of my presence in the dark corner nigh the sink. I heard the tinkling and clicking of the tea-spoons, and cups and saucers, and the sounds called up in my mind a longing for a cup of hot beverage to moisten my cracked lips and dry throat. But no tea—not even a drop—came my way. It became dark in the room where the fire was glowing, as well as in the damp unpleasant corner where I still continued to stand with my eyes turned to the blackness where, at an earlier period of the afternoon (or evening), I had been able to discern a few grimy shelves, and a jack-towel that seemed meant for me to strangle myself with. After awhile Mrs. Muscut lighted a

candle, and then, having seated herself once more, and chatted for another ten minutes in the same husky voice in which she had all along made her confidential communications to her husband, suddenly exclaimed in a harsh shrill tone, as though she wanted to make herself heard a mile off:—

“Miriam Copley, quick—come here!”

The period of my neglect had been so protracted, that I could scarcely credit my ears when at length Mrs. Muscut condescended to address me once more. There was no doubt, however, left in my mind, when Mrs. Muscut impatiently reiterated her request that I should quit the corner and approach her more honourable quarter of the room.

Opening my contracting eye-lids as wide as possible, so as to appear lively and wide-awake in the presence and before the terrible gaze of Mrs. Muscut, I compelled my aching legs to move briskly across the brick floor of the

apartment. The candle that was alight on the table contrasted so brilliantly with the blackness of the angle in which I had been standing, that my sight was dazzled by its splendour, and I had to wait a few seconds ere I could distinguish the different objects before me. When however my visual powers were restored, I remarked with a quickness of observation which has been one of my most unvarying and useful mental endowments, that Mrs. Muscut's face was flushed, and that Mr. Muscut's eyes gleamed with singular brightness, and that amongst two tumblers, two spirit-bottles, and a sugar-basin, there stood on the table a small stumpy glass-stopped bottle, containing a black fluid, and bearing across its plethoric shape a paper, on which was printed "POISON." My surprise and horror may be imagined when I saw Mr. Muscut proceed to pour some of the contents of this horrible bottle into his tumbler of brandy-and-water, and after nodding

at me with fearful significance, drain off the mixture with relish. So much exhilarated was he with the effects of this performance that, as he threw himself back in his chair, and stroked his long white hair with his feeble hands, he closed the paralytic lids of his right eye with a movement that aimed at being a jaunty wink.

“Have you eaten your supper?” inquired Mrs. Muscut.

“I couldn’t eat any, ma’am,” was my timid response.

“Yar couldn’t?—Is this the way yar treat the wholesome food I, Ann, and Dannell my husband, Muscut put before you? Do yar mean to say yar been so owdacious as to put on the sulks, and har refused yar victuals!”

I began to cry.

“Hold yar whimpering! Cease yar whining—or yar’ll have summut to whine for. And now tell me what has put your

blood up in this way. What have you to blubber about?"

Without any definite hopes that good would result from a courageous line of conduct, I replied boldly, "I am unhappy because Mr. Haggart told me you would take me to a kind rich missus, and I thought when I started off with you this morning that you were going to carry me to a fine house, where I should be brought up honestly, and see beautiful things—and—"

Here I paused abruptly, and allowed a burst of genuine tears—that had all the art and none of the artifice of eloquence—to tell what my tongue could not say. But I was addressing an audience who had no tender emotions for the feeble wretched child they had got into their power.

"Dannell Muscut," exclaimed Mrs. Muscut, in a guttural tone.

Daniel raised himself from the recumbent

position, and leaned forward in his chair, looking me steadily in the face with eyes that twinkled venomously, and stretching his right hand out in the direction of the fire-place.

“Dannell Muscut,” repeated my mistress, “Dannell Muscut, do you sit by, and hear your wife insulted by a grasshopper like that?”

The taunt aroused all the manly courage of the venerable Daniel. He snatched a stumpy hearth-brush from the fire-place, and struck me with all his force on the top of the head. I screamed with fear as much as pain, and cried aloud for mercy; but again the thick handle of the brush descended—this time giving me a blow just behind the left ear—and I dropped upon the ground senseless.

CHAPTER VI.

SERVITUDE.

WHEN my senses returned to me, I was alone in a small room, or rather closet, that had no furniture whatever save a piece of ragged matting, and a square yard of rough cloth such as is used to make the commonest horse-clothings of. The former article, it appeared, was my bed, and the latter its coverlet; at least I conjectured so, as it soon became clear to me that I had passed some hours in slumber

under one and upon the other. The walls of the chamber, once white, were green with the effects of damp, and the one window, that could not boast a single unbroken diamond of glass, was crossed and laced by strong iron bars. There was a fireplace, and, half unconsciously, I crept to it, and looked up the chimney—possibly hoping to find in it the means of access to the roof of the house, and thence to liberty ; but two stout bars, fixed in the brick-work, made it evident that escape through that passage was not to be effected. Next I tried the door, but that, of course, was, as I had anticipated, bolted.

Putting my hand to my head, which was stiff and sore with the blows of the previous night, I found that it was bandaged tight with a kerchief tied in a knot at the top of my forehead, but the stain of the blood on my dress informed me that the wound given by the second blow had bled profusely. I was doubt-

less weak with fasting and maltreatment, for my brain began to reel, and my knees to totter, so that I felt the only way to save myself from falling would be to lie down. I therefore returned to my lair on the dirty mat, and I drew the rug round me to fence off the chill air. Prudently, too, I tried to sleep, but my efforts were unsuccessful, and I lay for at least two hours watching the cold grey dawn stream in through my prison window, and waiting sullenly the misery which I felt was in store for me.

It did not tax my keen wits to recognise the exact nature of my position. For an infant, I was strangely sharp in reading character, and detecting the motives of those whose actions aroused my attention; and now every turn and point in the game of the last few days that had before been obscure to me lay out in the full light, uncloaked and without misrepresentation. My father had committed

no murder, for I had seen him struck dead by the very man whose life he was supposed to have taken, and the gamekeeper had been shot by Joel Haggart. All this I knew, had been an eye-witness of—had been the only eye-witness of, with the exception of Jack Tandy, whose interest would keep him quiet about the matter. I was the only person whom Joel Haggart had to fear; as long as I was unable to reveal the truth concerning the fray at Melton Stubbs, he was secure from detection. But once let me have the will and the power to give evidence against him, and it would not be long ere the gallows would be raised at Clumford jail, and the literature of our country be enriched with the last dying speech and confession of as clever a knave as had ever adorned a virtuous rural district. Prudently, therefore, had he made me over to the care of his sister. Would she be true to him, and keep me prisoner all the days of my life?

Undoubtedly she would. Quickened in wit by the alarming circumstances of my case, I saw that Mrs. Muscut would be induced by a combination of motives to perform with fidelity the task she had undertaken—by pride, love of money, and cruelty. Of course she would not wish to see her brother hung, and have his name become a bye-word for shame. Joel Haggart also was rich enough to pay liberally anyone who rendered him courageously dangerous service ; and a sister's love to her brother is a powerful and active sentiment, when he is able, and in the mind, to pay handsomely for it in money. Moreover, I doubted not Mrs. Muscut would enjoy her possession of me ; would gladly use me as a drudge ; and take pleasure in taunting, and starving, and beating me, till, emaciated in body, and stupefied in mind, I should sink down cold and dead,—dead as poor Roger Copley.

With what admirable cunning had Joel

Haggart played his part! how adroitly had he managed to commit the crime and avoid the penalty! and with what exquisite dexterity had he blindfolded a poor child with fear, and made her lips utter the perjury that had saved him from exposure and destruction. And was such the reward of falsehood?—not my falsehood, but *his*? It never occurred to me to regard my lamentable plight as a punishment for the lies I had deliberately told the magistrates; but I fixed my thoughts on the immunity from chastisement that had attended Joel Haggart's crimes. I saw in it only the natural result of consummate duplicity. All my misstatements, prevarications, and deceitful reticence were the consequences of his strong will and cunning acting on my ignorance and alarm; they were his faults, not mine,—and they went to swell the amount of his iniquities. Such, then, was the reward of clever lying—freedom from a disgraceful

death, and the power of acting according to one's wish for good or harm. How was this? Was it possible that all the abhorrence I had heard expressed for falsehood was only a trick by which the rich and gentle scared poor folk from adopting a line of conduct that would infallibly be most beneficial to them? It seemed so. And I embraced this as the lesson experience had given me; and, as I crouched on my dirty mat, and gnawed my nails to the quick, I resolved in after life, should I ever escape from my present captors, to profit by the teachings I had received. Clearly, I was a very wicked child—seeing what was set before me, and counting two and two as four!

A key turned in the lock of my dungeon, and Mrs. Muscut entered, grim and slatternly. She stood over me without speaking, examined my head, taking off the bandage and replacing it, felt my pulse, ordered me to put out my

tongue, and then, with a satisfied nod of the head, left the room. In a few seconds, she returned with a liberal supply of wholesome bread, and a tin mug full of table-beer, which she curtly ordered me to consume. I did so, and, as a consequence of my obedience, experienced a sensation of gladness and confusion, that was both novel and indescribably pleasant; in fact, the small quantity of alcohol contained in the table-beer had got into my head, and made me slightly tipsy. This agreeable state had no sooner been arrived at, than Mrs. Muscut, who had again absented herself for the few minutes during which I made my repast, returned and stood over my bed.

“Whar are yar lying so late as this i’ the morning?”

“I did not know I was to get up, ma’am—and till just now the door was locked.”

“No answering, yar huzzy—no wording or

maundering—yar must know me better than to think of doing so, and now is as good time as any time for beginning to teach yar.”

“Indeed, ma’am, I’ll do whatever you wish.”

“Will yar? But yar lie, yar little brat; yar want to run away—I see it in yar eye; but yar sha’nt. There are bars on yar window, and bars up the chimney, and every night yar shall be locked up here, and I’ll turn the key on yar, and yar shall never be let out save to do work under my own eye—and precious hard I’ll work yar. I have had three gals as occupied this room, one arter the other; and I warked ’em, and flogged ’em, and starved ’em, and made ’em live in filth till they died—died by inches. And so I’ll do to you. I like pauper brats, for the law lets you treat ’em as you like, and as there’s none in the house save me and my old man, I can feed ’em as I like, and use ’em as I like, and yet there

are no words made the country through.—Ah, yes, we are nice and lonely here ; it's a sweet place for making away with a parish brat. And, now, tell me what yar mean by shamming as yar did last night, and pretending to fall down stunned just because my Dannel tapped you on the head playful-like with a small wand ? ”

“ I did not sham, ma'am.”

“ What ! yar say yar did not sham, when I say yar did ! yar dare to contradict me ! yar dare to tell me I tell lies ! yar dare to use such language to yar lawful mistress ! I never heard o' the like ! ”

Having thus ingeniously argued the case till she had put me in the position of a rebellious and insolent girl calling her a liar, Mrs. Muscut seized me by the neck with her left hand, and drawing from behind the skirt of her dress her right hand, that had up to this point of the interview been concealed, waved

and brandished over me the terrible lash of Tommy.

I will not weary or vex the reader with a minute recapitulation of all the barbarities that formed the ingredients of my cup of bitterness whilst I was under Mrs. Muscut's dominion. I must be believed when I say that that energetic lady was as good as her word. In every particular my life was such as she graphically declared it should be. Every night I was locked up in the cold closet, and kept in under key, and bolt, and bar, during the hours of darkness. Every day I was taken out of this dungeon, and made to work, under the lash and eyes of my merciless task-master and mistress, attending the fowl-yard, plucking the fowls and preparing them for market, tilling the miserable garden, and doing the drudgery of the house. Never a day passed that I was not beaten with greater or less severity.

For two years I was never permitted to stir off the premises ; and never was I left alone during the hours I worked in and about the house. The bold savage eye of the woman, or the feeble cruel one of the man, peered on me from some corner, wherever I was and whatever I chanced to be doing. It was soon manifest to me that they apprehended I should attempt an escape ; and at the end of the first fortnight of my captivity they took a most comical measure against any design I might entertain of flitting.

The wash-house, as it was termed, which with the kitchen (I mean the ordinary living-room of Mr. and Mrs. Muscut) constituted the ground-floor of the house, was entered by a doorway, the posts of which were made of massive oak. Into one of these posts a stout staple, passing through an extreme link of a heavy iron chain, was driven. The other end of this chain termi-

nated in a bright steel fetter, which, regularly as the day came round, was fitted to my ancle, and locked with a key which it was Mr. Muscut's peculiar delight to cherish in his waistcoat pocket, and on the barrel of which he would, in moments of hilarity, whistle tunes derisive of all degrees of bondage. I was thus securely tethered to a point in the centre of the domicile, and my owners could turn their backs upon me, while I performed my tasks in either apartment, without any fear of my taking to my heels and compelling them to pursue me, or let me depart at the risk of public scandal. But they were too cautious ever to leave me unwatched. It was a very rare occurrence—not oftener than once in a fortnight that anyone approached the house; and even so, in nine cases out of ten, the intruder was a messenger from a higgler in fowls with an order for some of the articles

in which the Muscuts dealt, who took himself off speedily after having executed his commission. But, few and far between as were these visits of strangers, they were still frequent enough to impress on my captors the necessity of being provided for them, and of never letting anyone by any chance know of my forming a part of the household. To avoid any such disclosure, therefore, either my master or mistress always hovered round me when I was engaged “below-stairs;” and immediately any stranger drew nigh to the habitation—if even Mrs. Muscut’s little house-dog was uneasy and barked, as though the scent of unknown wayfarers irritated his nerves—I was hurried across the wash-house, pushed into the coal-closet, and had the key turned upon me in a twinkling. Every Wednesday, before dawn, Mrs. Muscut went off with a store of poultry to Livermere market, and never returned till night.

When I reflect on this period of suffering, I cannot understand how it was I lived through it all, much more how I survived it with unimpaired mental faculties. Unquestionably it robbed me, beyond a possibility of redemption, of the more delicate of my moral endowments, and rendered me incapable of arriving at that goodness which I am compelled, in spite of an envious and detracting spirit, to own I have witnessed in some few mortals—men and women—whom I have regarded with mingled feelings of wonder and dislike, cordial affection and degrading self-humiliation. Never for one minute till I had freed myself from this horrible servitude did I lose a vivid consciousness of the wrongs that had been done me, or cease to burn for vengeance. Night and day I fretted my brain to discover means not only of escape, but also of paying back the injuries I had received. When

I had fits of muscular spasms, attended with foaming from the lips, they were the consequence of my futile rage at being worsted in a deadly struggle, and in not being able to bite and suck the life-blood from those who grasped me round the neck. It was intolerable to think that I should pass away without making terrible reprisals on my captors. I deemed that I could die happily if I might only first be permitted to see Joel Haggart swing from a gallows before Clumford jail, and know that Ann Muscut rued the day she ever raised hand to oppress the poor orphan child.

I believe this passion for vengeance had a most beneficial influence on my physical condition, that it nerved me to endure a weight of suffering that I must otherwise have sunk under, that it supported me against, and assisted me eventually to triumph over the combined forces of exposure to inclement atmosphere,

loathsome diet, incessant toil, cruel contumely, and constant stripes. For I grew in stature. Thin, cadaverous, hideously emaciated, I clung to existence, and climbed up it—as a scarlet runner, or a hop springing from a thirsty soil, twines round a pole.

A year of my captivity had slowly worked itself round; cruelty had not stupefied me; on the contrary, my intellect, from continually dwelling on my *wrongs*—and searching out a way to avenge them—instead of being clouded and feeble, was morbidly active and self-reliant. Weird, cunning, secretive, revengeful, I harboured in my little breast a legion of devils that never ceased to sting and fillip my brain.

One day I was crouching over a basket in the wash-house, plucking a pair of chickens, when I heard behind me a harsh rattle in a human throat that made me jump as if an adder had stung me. My chain rattled and

clanked on the bricks of the wash-house floor, as I sprung forwards ; then my tether checked me, and turning round I confronted Joel Haggart. The year had much altered him ; he was even yet more corpulent, and his enormous cheeks were pale and dropped over the sides of his thick neck ; and in his red eyes, with bleared lids, and in his swollen palsied lips that were unable to give precision to his utterances, I detected at a glance the inroads of constant intemperance. I observed this in an instant ; and to my dying day I shall remember the dreadful pang that seized my heart, as it flashed across me that he might *die* ere I should be able to *kill* him.

“ What, you’re not dead yet ? ” he exclaimed with an oath as he laid a heavy hand on my neck, and, swinging me round, shook me till my teeth chattered.

On a table at the other side of the kitchen lay a long bright pointed knife that was used

to cut the throats of chickens and dress poultry with ; my eye fell upon this weapon, and in a second of time I calculated the possibility of springing to it, snatching it up, and striking right to the heart of my enemy.

But with lightning rapidity the thought vanished as it had come ; I saw that it would be absolute madness to attempt such a plan of vengeance, and I rejected it instantly. But he saw what had passed through my mind ! the fury of my flashing eyes had told him my diabolical purpose, and cowed by me—the feeble, starved, chained victim of his barbarity, he staggered speechless and pallid away, through the dwelling-room into the garden in front of the house.

Joel Haggart stopped till a late hour that day ere he departed. He dined and drunk with his brother-in-law and sister at noon, and he supped and drunk with them at about seven in the evening ; and after supper he

continued his potations for full three hours, during which time he contrived to take into himself an astounding number of tumblers of rum-and-water, or of gin poured out of a tall bottle and diluted with scalding hot water poured out of a jug. Ann Muscut took part in the jollifications, but not to excess ; she was a self-indulgent creature, but was prudent enough, if not virtuous enough, never to wander far beyond the limits of sobriety. Daniel Muscut also joined in the festivity, and without ever stirring a muscle, save when he mixed or sipped his beverage, or when he raised his shrivelled hands to stroke down his long white locks, imbibed enough ardent drink to put courage into an entire regiment of Russian soldiers. And I had to watch this symposium, standing at my servile post in the dark corner, nigh the sink, with the iron fetter round my ankle, and the chain that tethered me to the wash-house door lying

coiled on the kitchen bricks like a sleeping serpent. It was as dull, heavy, lifeless an occasion of hilarity as it is possible to conceive; there was no laughter, no song, no pledging of health, no toast, no attempt to make the tongue utter the language of merriment, no manifestation of any taste, sentiment, or relish of any kind, save a lethargic inclination for the stupefaction of drunkenness. I noticed that every time Daniel Muscut filled his glass, after mixing the sugar, and spirit, and hot water, he added to the potion some of the dark fluid out of the small stout bottle, labelled POISON, that had attracted my attention on the first night of my seeing him, and which many weary nights since that time, I had looked at, as a be-charmed gazer regards a rattle-snake, and had pondered upon, while a vague purpose, tending to a horrible crime, dimly took form and substance in my wretched existence. And as I then stood a spectator of that melancholy orgy,

I speculated on whether it was possible for me to use that small stout bottle, containing dark fluid, and labelled poison, as a means of working liberation for myself and vengeance on my enemies? Could I by any sleight of hand, any exercise of adroitness, bring it about that Daniel Muscut should mistake the poisonous tincture for the less noxious spirit, and compose a draught of deadly power? Was this anyhow to be effected? The proposal took hold of my fancy, it aroused my imagination, it bewitched me with ghastly hideous hopes, the blood at my heart leaped quickly to and fro, and I saw a vision before me of a still, silent farm-house kitchen, and a table in it covered with materials for a rude debauch, in which a mysterious bottle—empty—and a huge glass beaker—empty also—figured conspicuously; I saw also on the table a stinking candle, with clotted wick and rancid fat guttering down into a winding-sheet; and sitting in chairs

beside the table, one on one side and one on the other, two figures—two human creatures, a grey-haired man and a huge herculean woman—slumbering heavily with thick stertorous breathing. Soon their breathing became louder, more laboured, more spasmodic; then the rattling, and retching, and quick starts became feeble sobs and sighs; then the struggle between mechanical life and the drug ceased—the foul candle went out in darkness, and so did the lives of two mortals, whom I had night and day, for many nights and days, prayed God to remove from the thorny tangled spot of the vast life-forest into which, away from all human mercy and justice, weak, powerless, and alone, I had strayed.

Hush! there was muttering over the table. Daniel Muscut was leaning back in his chair with closed eyes and nodding head, dallying with the stupor that was his liveliest enjoyment; but Ann Muscut and her brother in

hoarse confused whispers were conversing. They did not intend me to hear, and they lowered their voices so as scarcely to be audible to each other; but I, in my distant corner, distinguished every syllable—the life of suffering and watching, endurance of evil, and preparation for escape that I had led for months had made my body deceitful as well as my mind; my nerves were as well fitted as my will to overreach my tyrants.

“Sister Ann, I must be going, and I hope I shall live to come round and look at you another year.”

“Yar will, if yar take care of yarself, and don’t allow foolish fancies to cast yar down.”

“I can’t help the fancies; they will come on one, and I cannot drive them away. I have never, since that night at the Stubbs, been the same man that I was before; I drink, but the drink don’t cheer me—however much I take,

I can't manage even to lose my senses ; my hand shakes, I have no heart to eat as I used, and at night—oh, God Almighty ! in the dark night—I roll from side to side, and if I turn one way, there is Roger Copley—him ! and if I turn the other, there is Miriam Sandford—her ! ”

“ Joel Haggart,” responded Ann Muscut, with something of sisterly tenderness modulating her harsh words, whispered though they were, “ yar a born fool. Don't be a weak blubbering babe. Don't let the three counties say that Joel Haggart's heart failed him at last, and he died a whining, canting, snivelling coward of his own fears, instead of the gallows—Jack Tandy can't hurt yar, and that gal there will never trouble yar; so cheer up, and don't think of the past.”

“ But I do think of the past, and I must. And, Ann, I do think, and can't help thinking, that if life was to come over again, I would be

an honest man, working at a trade, and living like a Christian."

There was a pause in the conversation, of two or three minutes' duration, during which Daniel Muscut's head continued to rise and fall, as he alternately waked and dozed again. Joel Haggart drained off the liquor that remained in his glass, and Ann Muscut eyed her brother keenly, as if examining the very fibres of which his face was composed, and endeavouring to detect, lurking amongst them, the seeds of decay and dissolution.

"Ann Muscut," observed Joel Haggart, putting down his glass, and resuming the conversation in a louder, a more husky, and a more unpleasant undertone, "if I come again next year, I should like to find *one less in the party*."

Ann Muscut started, as her brother stopped and pointed significantly to the corner where I was standing.

"She can't hurt yar, Joel Haggart."

“She can. She’s alive.”

“And let her. She can’t harm yar.”

“I did not think, sister Ann, when I sent her here she’d have lived so long. She is a delicate-made child, and I did not think she’d have stood it. You must have used her gently.”

“Have I? Have I? I flog her as I wouldn’t flog my market hobby; Dannell is always knocking her about the head and worrying her; I starve her—she don’t live so well as one of yar pigs; and however cold the weather may be, she has scarce rags enough to cover her nakedness.”

“She don’t look as if she went through all this. She is *alive*; she grows; she’s thin enough—but she don’t look thick in the skull and dunderhead, as a suffering child ought to look; she ain’t wandering and dull in her wit, she ain’t heavy and stupid, she has got her understanding better than you or I have.”

“Has she? May be. But, Joel, if she have, I’ll knock it out of her between to-night and this time year.”

“I don’t want you to do her a violence, Ann, but if the life as well as the understanding could be taken out of her, I should be easier.—As I said afore, if I come here again next year, *I should like to find one less in the party.* Only mind, Ann, no violence.”

“She is a good servant, and does a lot of work.”

“Well.”

“And I am not myself so strong as I used to be, and if I lost her, I must have another gal in her place,—and most likely if I had any other gal, she’d have friends whom I should be forced to let come about this place; and in that case, I could not feed her so cheap as I do this one, and besides, I should most likely have to pay her a wage.—And you know, Joel, I am not rich.”

“ But I am, Ann Muscut ; at least I have something tidy to leave behind me, and as I have made no will, and don’t intend to make any, you’ll have all at my death ; but—mind—*mind me*, Ann Muscut, if I come here next year, and have reason to think you are not such a good sister as I have always thought you, why, I may take it into my head to make a will you wont over much like.—Now you see what I am driving at. Only, take care—no violence.”

“ Brother Joel, I have always been a good sister to you, and I’ll mind your words now. I don’t promise anything ; and of course I am not going to do anything to bring it about ; but somehow I think that that child’s health is not so good as yar fancy it, and I should not be surprised if yar hear, when yar come here this day year, that she is under the churchyard green.”

Joel Haggart made no reply to this

response. He rose without a word, put on his coat and hat, and walked out of the room and house steadily as if he had drunk nothing but water. He did not say farewell to Daniel Muscut, who, at length sound asleep, did not on his part think it incumbent on himself to rise and bid his guest and brother-in-law "God speed." Ann Muscut, however, followed her brother out of the house, and accompanied him to the stable to assist in harnessing his horse and putting it in his cart; and when the affectionate couple had left the room, I was alone with the stupefied, drugged, unconscious Daniel Muscut.

Had I not been chained I would have made an attempt to recover my freedom, but the weight of the iron on my ankle reminded me that such an achievement was beyond my power. As it was, I turned my energies to accomplish whatever I might

be able to effect, within the limits of my confinement, that might work for my benefit sooner or later. Within my range was the fireplace, with its heavy poker and other irons, not to mention the brush that had once felled me bleeding to the ground. With one of these weapons, or with one of the knives that lay shining on the table, I could have approached Daniel Muscut, and sent him to render an account to his Maker for all the barbarities he had exercised on me ; and it occurred to me that it would be an unspeakable happiness to see his snowy locks dabbled with his own crimson blood, and to look down on his hated form lying prostrate and vanquished at my feet. But the reflection that this partial vengeance would not secure to me the great object that I had in view, restrained me from any such foolish and intemperate course. But still, I was alone, unwatched, the mistress

of my own actions in those lower rooms, and so in all probability I should remain for a few minutes. Surely, here was an occasion that I might turn to profitable result. Once more my eye fell on the stout bottle of dark fluid labelled POISON, and quickly I hit on the means of getting a powerful instrument into my hands.

To some it may seem strange, but to those who have made human nature a systematic study it will appear natural, that in the degradation and abject wretchedness of my captivity, I nursed with me a strong love *of having*—a passion for acquiring—an intense craving for property. With no more liberty or power than a cowed house-dog, that is only tenant of his kennel at the will of his master, I was ever longing to secure for myself the possession of something—anything ; and, in obedience to this impulse, I constantly kept my eye out for

strays and waifs, contemptible bits of rubbish, that a Parisian *chiffonnier* would scarce deign to stoop for, and, wherever I found them, I did my utmost to get them within my grasp and secrete them. The ingenuity I displayed in concealing my pickings and stealings astounded Mrs. Muscut, and gave terrible shocks to her moral sense. That good lady, although she had stolen me, was surprised and enraged beyond expression when she discovered that I too had a taste for stealing—bits of thread, old corks, glass vials, potatoes, feathers, ends of rush-candle, the lead from the window-frames, pieces of rusty nails, pins, handles of knives, and such other rubbish. Mrs. Muscut was of opinion that this tendency in one so young was positively dreadful to contemplate, and would, unless it were checked, lead to prodigious crime. And on stopping the evil, ay, on eradicating it, Mrs. Muscut virtu-

ally resolved; and, in the hopes of accomplishing her determination, she put in force for my benefit every species of terrorism and bodily infliction that all the investigators of, and authorities upon, juvenile delinquency have advocated. She laid traps for me, watched me, detected me in the very performance of theft, and of the yet greater enormity of having successfully guarded from her vigilance for weeks, in clefts of walls, fissures between bricks, artificial crypts in the garden, treasures illegally acquired. Her acuteness, however, was baffled, and her perseverance was of no avail; in cunning and secretiveness I was more than a match for her, and I stored away several precious articles that she did not even suspect me of having made prize of. Amongst these was a small stout stone bottle, capable of holding when full an ounce of fluid, or slightly more; it had originally

been used, I should think, as a receptacle for ink, and had been thrown away as valueless. I had turned it up when digging in the garden, and joyfully had made it my own; to wash it, cleanse it of all defilements, and furnish it with a cork gave me a world of pleasureable excitement; and to bear it hidden, in a pocket I had cleverly contrived in the band of the petticoat I wore the whole time of my captivity, to toil with it concealed there, and to cherish the flattering consciousness that I had shielded it for months from the lynx eyes of my persecutor, gave me an enjoyment that surely none but Anne Muscut and her husband would have grudged me.

And now it was to do me important service. Lifting my chain up in my hand, so that its noise should not notify to Mrs. Muscut out of doors that I was moving, or waken the sleeper, I proceeded warily to the

table, letting out at each step only enough of the chain to admit of my advancing another pace. I reached the table without creating the disturbance of a pin-fall; Daniel Muscut slept heavily; in a trice I took my little bottle from the band of my under-dress, whipped out the cork, filled the vessel full of the black liquid poison from Daniel Muscut's bottle, returned the latter vessel to its station on the table, and the former, after corking it, to its old place of concealment, and retraced my steps to the dark corner.

In another instant Anne Muscut returned, and coming up to me with a candle in her hand, eyed me with a scrutiny and a cruelty of aspect that well befitted the woman who had just closed a compact with her brother to murder me—*without violence!* No wonder that my heart beat fast, my knees shook, and a cold sweat stood on my forehead, while a death-like pallor rested on my emaciated face.

Anne Muscut, too, was colourless, and showed more signs of mental disturbance than I ever witnessed in her before or afterwards, as she observed gruffly :—

“ Yar not like yarself. Something has frightened yar, for yar as white as a sheet. Tell me true, as yar vally a whole skin—har yar heard ought I and Joel Haggart har been saying ? ”

“ I heard nothing, ma'am.”

“ What !—yar har not been listening ? ”

“ I listened, but you spoke so low I could hear nothing.”

My dissimulation satisfied her (or at least appeared to do so) that I was not aware of the atrocious agreement she had entered into with Joel Haggart. Without a word, she stooped and released my foot from the gyve, placed her heavy hand on my quaking frame, and conducted me upstairs to the garret closet that was my dormitory. She did not

strike me on the way, as was her custom ; possibly she was thinking how she was to strike me that last blow—*which was to be free from violence!* On reaching the summit of the stairs, as she pushed me into the closet, she so far softened to her victim as to utter a gruff good-night, after which unwonted effort of politeness, she closed the door on me, locked it, bolted it, and trod heavily downstairs to her husband.

And I, in the pitch-darkness of my prison, sate cold and shivering, huddled up in the corner on my rug, speculating how long a time would elapse ere I should be stretched upon it, ghastly and lifeless as the poacher who fell at Melton Stubbs, and debating whether to drink off the fatal draught I bore about my person would not be putting it to its best possible use.

To such unnatural and hideous thoughts had my childhood become accustomed !

Think of this, good people all, if, as you know more of me, you should feel constrained to judge me severely.

CHAPTER VII.

LIBERATION.

AND now the sternest part of the conflict between me and Ann Muscut began, and continued for well-nigh another year. A fortnight had not elapsed since her brother's visit, ere she commenced operations that were manifestly intended to lead to the result Joel Haggart had at heart. My work was made more laborious, my treatment became harsher, and the fare on which

I supported life became daily more unwholesome ; the means of retaining any approach to personal cleanliness was denied me. There was also another step that Ann Muscut took for the accomplishment of her purpose, which, for cold-blooded calculation of the best means to the end in view, surpassed all her other atrocities. She had the window of the closet, in which I passed my nights, boarded up, and she also closed with bricks and rubbish the chimney of the apartment, so that, by excluding fresh air and light, she might render the atmosphere of the dormitory noxious to the last degree. Winter came, and my chilled limbs broke out with unsightly blains, that threatened to mortify and of themselves terminate my existence ; and Ann Muscut inspected the sores daily as if she had a vested interest in them, since they might possibly relieve her from the necessity of performing an act from

which she shrank. But starving winter passed away, and I remained. Spring came with protracted east winds, and a cold settled on my chest, and a cough racked my lungs day and night; and Ann Muscut, with an affectation of maternal solicitude for my health, was continually forcing me to make deep inspirations, and inform her how much they hurt my side, and the exact spot at which the pain was worst. Knowing her game, I exaggerated my sufferings, and induced her to believe that it was impossible for me to live till the May-flowers blossomed. When she had satisfied herself that my case was desperate, it amused me to notice how her manner softened to me. She flogged me less frequently; she sometimes excused me a portion of my diurnal toil; she would even at times let me sit unmolested on a stool near her fire; and on two or three occasions she liberally bestowed on

me a basin of hot oatmeal-gruel before I went to bed. With exquisite benevolence also she prepared me for the change, which she anticipated would soon take place in my condition, and made me furbish up out of a prayer-book my reminiscences of the church catechism; but faithful to leading resolutions, she ordered me one cold night, after I had learnt and said to her before the blazing kitchen fire my duty to my neighbour, to go across the yard in the pelting rain, with no bonnet, and see if the door of the hen-house was securely fastened.

The good woman soon talked to me about death, and whether I had repented of my sins and was ready to die. With much crying I answered that I thought I could die with composure if she (Mrs. Muscut) would be good enough to pardon me all my offences to her, and forgive my having been so wicked as I had been. Whereupon Mrs.

Muscut unctuously assured me that she forgave me all my sins to her, freely and from the bottom of her heart, and explained to me that she had never beaten me out of irritation or malevolence, but solely for the sake of my own moral welfare. I said that I was convinced of the truth of her assertion, and this so pleased her that she comforted me by saying she had no doubt I should go to heaven, and should always behave myself properly when there, and concluded by bestowing on me an enormous plateful of pork-pie. It tickled me to watch Mrs. Muscut as she shuffled about and made herself believe that she was an eminently virtuous English matron and adorned her sex not less than she benefited me. And the woman was sincere in her self-commendations. She honestly regarded herself as an unquestionably honest, well-intentioned, and praiseworthy woman,—ay, she did so, even while she kept snugly packed at

the corner of her most secret heart-recess a resolve to send me to another world ere the close of the year, if I did not of my own accord take my departure sooner. Of such contradictions are we composed! Have I not in my course through life found the very bad almost always able to delude and humbug themselves into a belief of their excellence and probity? and have I not as frequently found the very good—the pure and stainless ones of the earth—ready to lament their own deficiencies, and to weep over themselves as corrupt and abominable?

But I lived on. Spring softened once more into summer, and my cough disappeared. Infuriated at the trick which had been played upon her, Ann Muscut redoubled her cruelties. What she aimed at was to dispose of me in such a manner that she might, while reflecting on her death-bed upon her past life, be able to persuade herself that I had died in the ordinary

course of nature. Unfortunately I was too tenacious of existence for her plan, and, strange to say, as the struggle between us went on, my spirits rose, and a sense of superiority to my antagonist inspired me with courage and powers of endurance. On some important points I had the whip hand of her: I knew what her game was, while she was ignorant that I possessed this knowledge; I was always on the look-out for some means of rescuing myself, while she had conceived that I was resigned to my fate; and, lastly, I had in my possession that which would send her promptly to Hades if at any time I could administer it to her.

The best use to which I could put the poison I had in my keeping was a subject that ever occupied my thoughts; and as summer melted away into autumn, and the chance of my meeting a violent death from Ann Muscut's hands became more imminent, I was

strongly impressed with the necessity of coming to a conclusion.

Eventually my doubts were terminated by a chain of circumstances over which I had no control, but from which it need not be said I was ready to accept the advantages they offered. It happened that Ann Muscut, so strong and so unmerciful to the weak, was attacked with illness ; she did not take to her bed, or lose bodily strength from her indisposition, but she suffered violent spasms of the body, and in her agonies uttered groans and cries that made the days bright and cheerful to me. Her malady was consequent on indulgent living, and the doctor she consulted at Livermere having directed his chief and first attention to the central portions of the trunk, whereat Blucher ordered his soldiers to direct their guns when aiming at their foes, gave her a bottle of soothing mixture. This compound was black and muddy, and had a most offensive

smell ; its taste also was extremely nauseous. I had frequent opportunities for knowing that it had these properties ; as twice a-day—morning and afternoon—I had to uncork the bottle which held it, and pour out under the sick woman's eye her appointed dose, which she would drink with a sufficiently bad grace, and then solace her offended nerves by making me suck slowly down a tea-spoonful of the mess, and watching my grimaces as I did so. Ann Muscut would not have been so willing to let me have such free access to her medicine bottle, if she had known all the thoughts that came into my head whenever I fixed my eyes upon it. Perhaps, too, if she had known the fierce passions and resolution that lay concealed in the meagre body of her slave, she would have deemed it prudent to conciliate her, to soothe her with kindly words, to endeavour by tardy charities to obliterate from her mind the memories of past cruelty,—at

least to abstain from further irritation and wrong. But Ann Muscut did not see well enough for this; and she went on—as we all are wont to do—raising up an avenging fate and stern retribution out of the very trifles and adjuncts of her existence, which she held in the liveliest contempt.

In short, I had determined to murder Ann Muscut; and I was only looking about for the best occasion and fittest means for doing so. I had satisfied myself, by observing Daniel Muscut's daily potations, that I held in my possession enough poison to kill outright the woman I wanted to rid myself of. It is worthy of remark that when I had resolved on taking this step, much, indeed almost all, of the individual antagonism I had for months cherished to her vanished, and I regarded her with that calmness and freedom from passion with which I might now look on an obstruction of lifeless matter, a barricade, raised across a

street, I wished to drive down; and her destruction appeared to me only as something which it was requisite to accomplish, as without it I could not even commence a journey that I was desirous of accomplishing. The point I really aimed at was the exposure and death of Joel Haggart. To effect this I was quite ready to sacrifice myself; and without sacrificing myself it was clearly beyond my power to achieve it. The scheme of my operations had already taken definite shape and form in my mind. Before the fatal opening of October, when Joel Haggart would reappear and find *one less in the party*, I would take advantage of the absence of Daniel Muscut, who had lately commenced attending a market several miles distant, on Fridays, and would by hook or by crook administer poison to his wife. This done, I should have time for breaking off the fetter from my chained ankle and escaping before the old man's return.

Freedom once attained, I would hasten over the heath, and walk along till I came to a town, and there I would find some one willing to listen to my story, to whom I would make a full and courageous revelation of my crime,—stating how I had committed murder, and why I had perpetrated such an atrocious act. It was true that in due course I should be condemned to death and be hung; but so—*would Joel Haggart!*

It would be wrong in me to say that no twinges of conscience mingled with these meditations, that no doubts as to the rectitude of my contemplated conduct disturbed me. But I reasoned myself out of all weakness; and I constructed a series of arguments to fortify me in my resolution, which were strangely beyond the intellectual range common to most children of my years, and which then took such a firm hold of my mind, that no after nurture, no after conviction of the

duty of submitting patiently to the pain and wrong worked by the wicked in this world, no after acquaintance with the lovely and noble of my kind, sufficed to free me from their tyranny. Whenever in my future career the tempter whispered to me to be rid of my enemies, and break free from the chains of cruel circumstances, the same devilish suggestions have arisen in my mind, urging me to resolute, unflinching, unscrupulous, criminal action.

Time went on—my plans were matured—the very day for taking the critical and awful step was fixed in my mind, when intelligence reached me that suddenly made me falter in my purpose, and indeed for a few moments appeared to have removed the necessity of it. On the very morning previous to the day devoted to assassination, Ann Muscut received a letter. It was a rare occurrence in those days for the postman to visit any secluded farm-

stead, and my mistress was a person less liable than most persons of her class to the inflictions of correspondents. With a curiosity natural to my sex, and laudable in one circumstanced as I was, I put my eye to a crevice in the door of the coal-cellar, into which, according to custom, I had been thrust on the advent of the letter-bearer, and through the aperture I saw Ann Muscut tear open the letter and read it with eagerness and agitation. Her aspect as she did so was a spectacle ever to be remembered. Pale and trembling she laid the paper on the table of the wash-house, and turning to her husband, who happened to enter the apartment, said in a deep voice :—

“Dead, Dannel!—dead!—struck dead!”

“Stephen Mutlock?” responded the laconic Daniel, uttering with interrogative accent the name of a neighbouring dealer, to whom, I afterwards found, he owed a large sum of money.

“ You dolt ! no money-lender, but the only man of my own flesh and blood the wild world contained. Joel Haggart has fall’n dead, struck dead with the ’plexy; and his soul, with all its sins upon it, is afore the awful judgment seat of God.”

The stern and brutal woman, as she said this, sank on the wooden form beside which she was standing, and throwing her face forward on the table, sobbed violently.

For a few seconds Daniel regarded her, silent and astonished ; then he turned away into the next room, and fortified his nerves with a dram of his accustomed cordial. When he returned from this wise and prudent excursion, he found his wife still struggling in her strong agony of grief.

“ Hist, woman,” said he, attracting her attention by roughly pulling her shoulder, and then pointing to the door of the coal-cellar, “ she’ll hear yer.”

“And let her hear—and she shall hear it from my own lips,” replied Ann Muscut furiously, rising and approaching the door of the dungeon in which I was confined; “and if she so much as by a smile or brightening of her eye thanks God, by all the devils that are in me, I’ll murder her.”

So saying, she slipped the bolt of the door, and swung it open; and I, calm and with a new view of life rising before me, stepped out and approached the enraged woman. My sense of sudden relief, as I saw, in imagination, a natural and innocent way of extricating myself from my calamitous position, overmastered for a moment all considerations of misfortune in having Joel Haggart rescued from my grasp by death, and with a sudden lightness of heart I trod the bricks of the room unconscious of the iron that encircled my ankle.

“Mrs. Muscut,” I said, softly; I will not

triumph over you, I will not thank God for taking from the earth Joel Haggart, I will even be sorry for you. But now let me go. He is dead, and no harm can fall on him from the idle words the wretched girl who watched the fight at Melton Stubbs can utter. It was natural in him to do all in his power to render it impossible for me to injure him; I do not even blame him for his conduct; I can almost pardon him for the pain and suffering he has put on me. All that is of the past, and I will forget it, at least not revenge it on you or on him by blackening his memory. You cannot want my life now; my blood can do him no good, even if you killed me outright and let it run down upon his grave. You need not seem astonished at my words. For all this year past I have known your cruel intention to kill me, and you never took a step to fulfil it that I did not observe and understand it; and you never tried to hide from me what

you were resolved on, but I saw through your pretence and artifice. I heard you, that last night Joel Haggart was here, agree with him to murder me.—You see, I know everything. But now, let me go, and I promise, when I have once wandered away from you into the wide world, never to tell man, or woman, or child, of your wickedness and cruelty—never to tell any one that I am aware such a one as you are is on the face of the earth.—Let me go.”

I cannot positively aver that I used these very words; but on my sacred honour I can declare that I felt clearly, literally, and exactly what they signify, and that promptly and without hesitation I gave expression to my thoughts in an unbroken period of language similar to the above.

I had no reply in words to this address; but it struck home. With the bound of a savage beast the woman leaped towards me,

knocked me down with her fist, and trod upon me. With an alacrity and a degree of courage I had not given him credit for, Daniel Muscut threw his arms round his wife's body, and did his best to drag her away and to protect me.

"Let me go, Dannell—let me go. I will kill her," screamed the woman.

"Hold, Ann, hold—wary, be wary," answered Daniel,—“do what you like, but *no violence!* Joel told you not to use violence. Remember the law, as you said to me in the night I all but murdered yon starved cat. The law is an awkward thing. Remember the law.”

His interference was so successful, that after a long altercation with the wife of his confidence, he managed to lead her out of the wash-house, into the front room. They closed the door behind them, and left me in the inferior apartment to spy at them through the key-hole, and catch any stray words I

could of their conversation. The storm having subsided, they talked reasonably, prudently, and with their habitual cunning. Before all things it was clearly necessary that one of them should without delay make a journey across the country to bestow the honours of sepulture on Joel Haggart's corpse, and to look after the property he had left behind him. For this task Ann Muscut truly declared herself unequal; the cramp might seize the muscles of her body at any moment, and disable her for performing, with proper presence of mind and regard to her own interests, the duties of a sister at and *after* her brother's funeral.

It was therefore determined that Daniel Muscut should omit to attend the next day's market, and taking the pony and cart should make the journey to his deceased brother-in-law's house, and remain there in guard over all goods, documents, moneys, stock, furniture

and other chattels, until Ann Muscut joined him shortly after the funeral.

The fact that Joel Haggart's death promised to put good fortune in the way of my persecutors exasperated me beyond measure. It was bad enough to know that he had gone beyond the reach of my vengeance, and would never smart under the ignominy I was preparing myself to cover him with; it was no small addition to my trouble to learn that my captors had no thoughts of letting me go free now that the original object of my imprisonment had been served, but that they intended in *self-defence* to pursue a line of action they had commenced in *defence of another*. Far more galling, however, than these considerations was the reflection that Daniel Muscut and his wife were about to acquire wealth, while I, their contemned drudge, was even more luckless than before.—But they should not enter on the enjoyment of the prize!

I would strike! and all the deadly purpose, which for a few minutes I had dismissed from the list of my resolves, again returned to hold dominion over my mind.

Early the next day Daniel Muscut departed on his mission of "important family business;" and in the afternoon of that same day Ann Muscut was visited with one of her terrible spasmodic attacks. She called me to her side, and bade me rub the parts where she suffered the most pain; I administered her a dose of medicine from the bottle of filthy mixture that has already been mentioned, but the remedy was powerless. At the end of half an hour she demanded another glass of the abominable compound, and I poured it out for her and watched her drink it; but it had no more effect on her suffering than the former one. Soon she clamoured for more of the composing medicine; but as I measured out the third draught for her, I watched my opportunity

and poured into her glass the entire stock of laudanum I had carried about concealed on my person for twelve months. In another instant she had swallowed enough poison to kill three women in sound health.

“What har yar done?” she exclaimed the next moment. “What har yar done? the physic don’t taste the same. Yar har put some trash in it, yar little brat.”

“The cup was quite clean, ma’am, when I poured the stuff out of the bottle.”

She did not heed my reply, for she was already drowsy with the first influence of the poison. She sunk back on the pillows that propped her up on the bed on which she was reclining, and composed herself for slumber. Then after the lapse of a few more moments she rose up, and called out in a tone of fright, “Miriam Copley! Miriam Copley! What har yar done?—what har yar done? Yar have given me the wrong stuff—yar brat.”

“Ann Muscut,” said I, in thin, clear, measured tones, “listen to me. Listen to me, woman, for you are fast dying, and in a few moments, perhaps, you won’t know one of my words from another, and I wish you to know what you are dying of. I am a poor, weak, feeble, ill-used child, and you meant to take away my life; but I have been too quick for you—for I have killed you. I have poisoned you with the black poison out of Daniel Muscut’s bottle. Ann Muscut, you’ll meet Joel Haggart in hell—tell him who sent you there, for he’ll gnash his teeth when he hears it!”

With a scream the wretched woman tried to spring from her bed; but the deadly stupor already had control over her nerves, and she tumbled back an unconscious mass. I watched her breathings gradually become slower—and slower—and slower; I remarked a still tranquil calm steal over her harsh features, reducing them to womanly gentleness,

even childish serenity of expression, and as she lay in that deep, unspeakable repose, something of humanity within me made me shudder at the awful deed I had done. Then another change came o'er my victim. Her breathings became so laboured and rare that I questioned if each one would not be her last; and her countenance, a few seconds before so mild and placid in its unwont rest, became hatefully frightful as the muscles dropped down in ghastly, hideous relaxation. Horror-struck, I turned away, and could not find courage to look at her again.

The fetter was still at my ankle, the length of my chain permitting me to range over the whole ground-floor of the house, and also to mount up the staircase into my mistress's dormitory. With a shudder, I hurried from the chamber, and hastened downstairs, the chain clanking after me.

Quickly I burst open Ann Muscut's work-box, and took from it the key of the fetter, and in a twinkling I was at liberty. It was fast growing dark, but though I knew Daniel Muscut would not return, and that there was no chance of anyone else breaking in on the solitude of the house, I could not think of remaining one unnecessary moment in the neighbourhood of the terrible object that tenanted the sleeping room upstairs. I snatched up a scanty supply of bread and meat, and with no more clothing than the rags that ordinarily attired me, I ran forth over the heath that surrounded the homestead—into the blackness, and rain, and tempestuous winds of a stormy night.

CHAPTER VIII.

RAWLEIGH UFFORD.

BEYOND a vague and unpleasant memory of screaming winds, and driving rains, and Egyptian darkness, I have no recollection of my flight from the home of the Muscuts. I cannot recall what I felt in my mind as the warring elements beat upon me. I cannot even say whether I thought at all of the past or present, or future. Most probably I battled my way across the heath, as most mortals, after the departure of youth's sun-

shine, make the journey of life—under an instinct impelling me to flee from the evil behind, rather than under any confidence or hope in that which lay before.

After long toil, I fell down exhausted on the wet soil, and slept soundly—as though the ground had been a cradle, and the storm a mother's love-song. This much I am at liberty to surmise, for the first period of distinct consciousness, after my departure from the house of my captivity, commenced when I opened my eyes, and found myself lying on a bank that bordered a piece of meadow-land, with a magnificent landscape before me, and a bright sun over-head driving away the lingering mists of morning, and warming the fresh air. I had just time to notice the loveliness of the distant scene, to realise to myself a sensation of bodily refreshment and exhilaration, and then to remember the principal events of the previous day, when a voice—

such a one in its clear, rich melody as had never before fallen on my ear—observed :—

“Well, young lady, and how are you after your night’s rest? I hope your bed was warmed to your mind, and that you had enough clothes on. Would you like me to ring for your maid?”

I turned my face with surprise, and then rose up hurriedly as my eyes beheld the most superb object they had ever witnessed. A gentleman was standing alone before me, and I had approached him, and knelt to him on one knee before I was aware of having even risen from my recumbent position.

“Most theatrically performed!” observed he to whom I had rendered this natural obeisance. “Most effective! Who taught you that?”

I did not understand him, but continued to look at him with delight. He was not more than six-and-twenty years of age, he was

tall, gracefully formed, dressed in the handsome black velvet and white-legged costume that was generally fashionable in the last generation with aristocratic sportsmen when out on a shooting excursion. In his hands he held a brightly-burnished gun, and two pointers stood near him, wistfully gazing at his face. Perhaps he was somewhat clumsy in the upper part of his trunk, too wide and thick in the chest, and too broad in the shoulders, for perfect elegance. It might even have been objected to him that his shoulders were high as well as broad. But these were the only defects in his shape, and the many good points in his head atoned for them. His features were bold—not moulded by nature merely to please women, but to govern men; it was strange how such softness and regularity were infused in the prominent brows, large nose, pointed chin, and more than ample cheekbones. His lips were thin, and small, and

not hidden by the waves of moustache which rippled off into the bulk of his whiskers that were as black, and as silky soft as the curls rising from his white, broad, high forehead, and falling in snaky profusion over the back and sides of his head.

Of course the feeble child who cowered before this splendid creature—so stalwart in his manhood, and at the same time so replete with the grace and tender roundness of youth—was not able then to analyse his beauty. All she could do was to kneel and look up at him with emotions which, in their admiration and gladness, were adorative.

“Heaven bless me, poor child,” he began (when he saw how genuine and unstudied was my attitude of respect) with a kindness that no other voice on earth could have commanded, and which might well consti-

tute the music of the blessed in paradise, "had you no better home than that bank last night? Why, the very rabbits skipping about yonder are better off than you."

"They are, sir," I answered.

"Think you so, little philosopher?" he rejoined, smiling in a manner that encouraged me to proceed, and assured me that his ridicule was not for the weak; "come, now, tell me why you think the rabbits, or those partridges there (by Jove, what a splendid covey! but I wont fire) are better off."

"They seem to be happy now, sir, and by and bye some gentleman like you will shoot them—and kill them—and then there will be an end of them—"

"Well?"

"But a poor girl has neither happiness in this world, nor a way out of it without the sin of murdering herself."

“Would you like me to shoot you?”

“Ay, sir—if you think it would be best for me, and no wrong in you to do it.”

“Where is your home, child?”

“I have none, sir.”

“Good! then you are not bored to death with family quarrels. Where do you live? How do you live?”

I was silent.

“Can you read?” he continued.

“A little.”

“Do you say your prayers?”

“I used to—but—but I dare not now.”

“What a funny child you are! I know a good lady in London who fudges about prisons, who’d give a hundred pounds for you, for the pure pleasure of converting you, and writing your life in a tract. Come, you and I must know a little more of each other; and you must tell me what the row is all

about. Is my guess a right one?—You have got a cruel mistress; and after starving and beating you for a twelvemonth, she has turned you out of doors? or, perhaps you have run away from her? No—is that what you mean by shaking your head?”

“I have murdered her, sir.”

He did not start with surprise at this announcement, but he looked earnestly at me—with a scrutiny that made me feel as if my life was leaving me and going into him:—his dark violet-coloured eyes were so large, and burned with such pathetic force! I have never known such eyes in any other man. When moved by the deep passions of their owner, they were at one and the same time so vehement and yet so compassionate.

“It is true, sir,” I went on; “I could not bear my life longer. She tried to mur-

der me, she was bent on taking my life; and there was nothing for me but to kill her."

"And how did you kill her?"

"With poison."

"You are a very singular young lady—about as extraordinary a one as it has been my good fortune to meet for many a day. If you are acting, you act well; if you are in earnest — by all the tutelal deities of the lawless, I shall be sorry to see you hung."

As he said this, he dismissed from his eyes that strange scrutiny, in which pity overpowered amusement, and assumed an easy carelessness of expression, that made his countenance accord with the sportive-ness—perhaps the levity of his words.

"So you killed her, did you? Well done. It served her right. But you must tell me everything about it."

Uttering these words inviting me to further confidence, he sat down upon the grass, and beckoned me to take up the same attitude near him. I did not do so; but rising from my kneeling posture, I told at full length, with becoming words, and flashing eyes, and with my thin bare arms gesticulating wild emphasis into my statements, all my melancholy tale. I spoke of the fatal night at Melton Stubbs, and the part I had taken in it; I gave a graphic description of the fray, the manner in which my father was struck down and the keeper was shot by Joel Haggart. Of my horror and perplexity, I put before my auditor, as he afterwards assured me, a vivid picture; and I revealed to him how I had been terrorized into a labyrinth of falsehood and perjury, and had then been kidnapped and borne away to undergo, as a punishment for my wickedness, two long

years of oppression and cruel slavery. I saw him shudder as I dilated on the barbarities of Ann Muscut; and a thrill of proud joy crossed my breast, as I beheld him tremble, and turn white, and clench his fist. It was an intoxicating triumph for me to discern my power to move that handsome, kingly gentleman to sympathy with my sufferings and indignation at my wrongs; and I redoubled my efforts to render permanent the impression I had created. Nature had fashioned me for an actress, and evil treatment had thoroughly educated me in hypocrisy; but art and artifice were alike innocent of aiding me to the burst of bitter weeping into which I fell at the conclusion of my narrative.

He quieted me with a hundred soothing words; he bade me dry my tears, patting and caressing and cheering me as if I had been a beautiful and petted playmate,

and not a wretched girl, sordid alike in person and raiment.

“I do not want to escape punishment, sir,” I assured him, when a few minutes’ silence had composed me; “I bargained upon dying; I had death before my eyes when I killed her; but if you could help me to justice—I mean to righting my father—and showing that he didn’t do the murder, heaven would reward you, sir.”

“Then you believe in heaven, youngster?” he asked, smiling.

“A little, sir.”

“Who taught you?”

“My father, sir.”

“What was his name?”

“Roger Copley! my name is Miriam!”

At this the gentleman made an exclamation and whistled as if a thought had struck him; and then he cried out:—

“Ah, now I recollect all about it. To be

sure—Copley!—that was the name! I heard the head of my house wax eloquent about the enormity of the case. Tell me, my poor little water-rat, have you ever heard of the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth?”

“Father used to say the Earl was very hard on poachers, and that perhaps he would one day repent he had not kept a few other laws besides the game-laws.”

“Admirable!” observed the gentleman, several times, and he laughed heartily as if he thoroughly meant what he said; and then, once more becoming graver, he told me to go and sit down on the ground about six yards before him, for he had a mind to make a picture of me.

“There—that’s it, right opposite me—and pull that snaky hair away from the back of your neck, and bring it forward over your shoulders. I wonder Mother Muscut did not cut it off, before you cut her off. The fool

did not know how much it was worth, or she would have sold it to a hair-dresser. You see I am a bit of an artist ; and, if I am not mistaken, I'll put you in the Academy next year as a portrait of the eldest daughter of a nobleman."

So speaking, he took from one of his coat-pockets a small note-book, and in another minute was hard at work putting my semblance on one of the white leaves. While proceeding with his task, he did not cease talking in the same strain of banter and sound sense in which he had previously indulged.

"You see, very probably there will be a little public interest ere long attached to your portrait. For instance, if, after due consideration, I shall think it right to have you hanged for the murder of Ann Muscut, it will make the fortune of a print-seller to bring out a decent engraving of you. And very possibly I *shall* have to string you

up, just by way of giving society an example ; for you must know I am rather a great fellow in a small way—or a small fellow in a great way—a deputy lieutenant and possible sheriff for the county, and if the Earl of Linton-Stetchworth gives me the nod, I shall send a line up to Jack Ketch, and he and I will soon settle your business. Are you hungry, you meagre vixen ? ”

“ Very hungry, indeed, sir.”

“ Well, wait awhile, and you shall have some grub.”

During the next few minutes, which he employed with shading in the portrait he had taken of me, I occupied my thoughts with wondering where the gentleman’s grub was to come from, and thinking he was as superb and glorious a gentleman as Miriam Copley in the most lawless flights of her imagination had ever conceived. The question about the provision was soon settled, for all on a sudden

there was a cry of "Bravo, here you are!" in the distance, and then appeared a magnificent fiery bay horse, cantering up the green sward of the hill, and bearing at his heels a light cart in which sate two other gentlemen. The vehicle dashed up to us, and was checked by the side of my companion by the driver—a tall slight man, with pale face, sharp features, dull, grey eyes, and lank, straight hair, which was brushed close and was of a light reddish colour. This stranger was smoking an enormous cigar, and notwithstanding his accurate and quiet costume of black and grey he had a dissipated appearance; he was continually putting into his eye, and letting fall from it, a remarkably small eye-glass. I soon had reason to remark that he garnished his words with a liberal proportion of oaths, and almost invariably attempted to enhance the importance of his most trivial speeches with an appeal to Omnipotence; at the same time he spoke de-

liberately, and in a low voice, and was in most respects of style a gentleman—though an unpleasant one.

“Rawleigh Ufford,” observed this new comer, jumping from the cart, “I trust you are well this very fine morning which almost makes me ashamed of this cigar, and penitent for that second bottle of Burgundy last night. What sport have you had, Rawleigh? and where the deuce did you find that little scare-crow who is sitting there, as much like a witch in childhood, as any creature I have ever seen?”

“As to sport, I can say but little, save that I have loaded my gun, and had a good morning’s walk. In reply to your second question, I can only answer that I found our little scare-crow sound asleep on the bank. But she is a very pleasant companion, and has an amount of histrionic power in her somewhat attenuated person that will one day make her celebrated. She has, moreover, a fund of moral qualities

that will insure her success— I mean her ultimate elevation in life. Allow me to make you known to each other. Miss Miriam Copley! permit me to introduce to you my friend and Mentor, Mr. Charles Millicent. There are those that *call* him a scoundrel; I only *think* it. I trust one day to see you married to him.”

“Watson,” said Mr. Millicent, who sat down on the ground, with a horse-rug under him, and did not deign to address me directly, “take my brandy-flask out of my wrapper-pocket, and make the little beggar drink. I should like to see her topple about; it would be deuced good fun.”

Mr. Watson, the third of the trio, was a grave, common, smug, respectable-looking gentleman, dressed in black, and adorned with a white cravat; he was, upon the whole, of a clerical aspect, save that he looked too intelligent to be a parson. His forehead was low, but broad; his eye-brows were dark, bushy, and promi-

nent, and they shaded a pair of ferret's eyes, with which he keenly watched Messrs. Millicent and Ufford, as if they were two balls on a billiard-table and he were bent on making a difficult cannon off them, and sending his own ball with the same stroke into the pocket.

Mr. Watson grinned his satisfaction with the commission he had received, and leaving the bay horse that stood quiet as a lamb, hastened to act on Mr. Millicent's amiable suggestion.

"Watson," said Mr. Rawleigh Ufford, with an air of quiet authority and decision which made Mr. Watson's grin give way to that intense absence of expression with which prudent people cut their poor relations, "you'll be kind enough not to offer any impertinences to Miss Copley,—give *me* the brandy-bottle; and do *you* with all speed heat the kettle, and make some good strong coffee. The young lady will enjoy a cup of it, and the sooner you give

her some breakfast the more reason I shall have to thank you. Be quick.

“Certainly, sir,—immediately,” replied Mr. Watson, obsequiously.

It soon broke upon me that Mr. Watson was the servant either of Mr. Charles Millicent or Mr. Ufford; at first my suspicion that this was the case was almost dissipated by the consideration that neither of these gentlemen addressed the man abusively, or kicked him, or struck him with a whip, as Joel Haggart or Ann Muscut would have treated a servant. But in due course, as I watched Watson spread a cloth on the turf, and preparing a breakfast of hot coffee, ham, eggs, and rolls, and performing every part of his multifarious duties with singular adroitness, never for one instant allowing his white cravat to be ruffled, or both his eyes to quit the other two men who lay stretched at their ease on a rug which Mr. Millicent had taken from the cart, I had no doubt as to the

relation existing between the prompt servitor and those on whom he waited. And this point being settled, I had occasion to reflect on the difference between the manners of these masters, and all others my very small experience in life had brought to my notice, and to muse how well I should like to be employed as constant attendant on so noble and kind a gentleman as Mr. Rawleigh Ufford.

While breakfast was being prepared Mr. Ufford lay back on the rug, as I have already described him reclining, and read quickly several letters which his friend, Mr. Millicent, had brought him. It made me wonder to see him pass his eye over the closely-written sheets so rapidly, and then push them all crumpled into his pockets, as if he would neither trouble himself with reading them, every line, nor with folding them up neatly before putting

them away. I imagined he must be very much liked by his friends, or he would not get such long letters from them.

“That’s all right—seven letters, and not one of them from a tradesman,” observed Mr. Ufford, indolently, twirling his moustaches, and turning to his friend; “but the worst of it is the seven friends will require answers, whereas, if they were tradesmen, they would not be such fools as to expect any. I wish Watson was a gentleman, for then I would make him reply to them; or, better still, I wish, Milly, you were my servant—for then I would use you as a secretary.”

“As it is, I shall be happy to obey your orders,” observed Mr. Millicent, complacently.

For an instant I thought Mr. Ufford would have shown some contempt for his friend’s extreme readiness to oblige him;

but he did not—possibly he was too good-natured. Mr. Watson, however, was not the victim of any such amiability; for a sneer of bitter mocking contempt took possession of his unpleasant countenance as he heard the words come from Mr. Millicent.

The man's expression was such a novel one to me, and contained not merely such a forcible declaration of scorn for the last speaker, but also such unmistakable indications of a strong will and determined nature, constrained under the obsequious bearing proper to his menial vocation, that from that time I did not fail to observe him with attention. His face was pale, and his forehead low, but both were broad; he was a thin and careworn-looking fellow, yet he had every appearance of physical vigour and strength; his mouth was enormously large; and his eyes, quick, sharp, cunning, eager, had the strange effect of

being able to gaze in every direction at the same time. Possibly the silence, which it was his duty to observe in the presence of his master, aided the keen activity of his eyes in making him seem to me the impersonation of the sly and secretive.

It is no lying fancy or cheating imagination, fashioning dramatic positions and sensations out of after-experience, but a clear, vivid, unfading memory of this eventful morning, which emboldens me to say that, as I, a miserable, outcast, sinful child, sat watching those three men, a mysterious and alarming conviction stole over me that my destiny and theirs were inseparably connected. Lapped and bedded in misery, and utterly ignorant of what "life" meant to most of my own kind, I still could recognise, with a painful throb of surprise and unreasoning terror, that I had fallen upon those who were to fashion my career

for me. Some power fell upon me also that enabled me to read the character of each of those men—not perfectly, but well enough to discern how they would affect me, for good or for evil; which of them would be my bane, and which my blessing. Had I obeyed the impulses that chased each other through my heart, I should have run up to Rawleigh Ufford and nestled at his feet, I should have fled with terror from Charles Millicent, but as to Stephen Watson — I would have sprung at him, fixing my fangs in his throat, and tearing out his villain eyes.

“But the letters are all well,” again began Mr. Ufford, resuming, after a pause, the subject of his letters, “and the one last read, the most important. I am no longer a soldier, Charley; to-morrow I will shave off all this elegant superfluity of hair, and begin life again as a young civilian.”

“You’ll be prime minister in ten years.”

“Thank you. And in the same time you will either be a secretary of state, or have been prosecuted half-a-dozen times for libels inserted in your rascally papers.”

“By the way,” he added, “what news from the hall this morning? No one was up when I left.”

“Nothing had transpired before I left, except that Lord and Lady Penistoun, and little Miss Agnes, had received a summons to London, and they are off.—You know Mrs. Wingfield and the amiable young lady of the same name, who has paid Providence the compliment of accepting an estate worth two hundred thousand pounds, will be there to-night, and stay for a fortnight?”

“Of course I do.”

“Fair Goddess, combining all the good qualities of Venus and Minerva!—I see her game.”

“Indeed!—and what is the game that

Charles Millicent is so sagacious as to be watching, before it has been commenced ?”

Mr. Millicent lowered his voice, so that Watson should not hear ; but Watson heard every word that was uttered—as clearly as I did—whose ears were preternaturally sharp.

“ She would make a pretty countess ! What a glorious leader amongst the beauties of the peerage !—I presume she is not careless about advancement. We are all ambitious of something or other. What can she want ? It is impossible that she can be bent on getting money alone ; she has too much of that already.”

“ Possibly she is ambitious of poverty ? ”

“ Ha, ha !—no ; it’s rank she will aim at.”

“ Well ? ”

“ She will wish to connect herself with a strong set in her own county—and a stronger one in London.”

“ Surely you must be in her confidence ? ”

“Mark my words, and judge me ere long as a true prophet or a false one,—she will bring down Charley, your lucky cousin (I wish he might break his neck to-morrow at Burnop-field), and in due course she will reign, not at Braden Manor, but in a far grander castle as the Countess of Linton-Stetchworth.”

“Fudge!—here, Watson, coffee and breakfast.”

Clearly Mr. Millicent, although he had a smart way of talking, and assumed an absurd tone of knowingness, was not a very keen observer, or he would have discovered how unpalatable his suggestions were to his companion, and would have desisted at the outset from this outburst of prophecy. Clearly also Stephen Watson saw farther in the game than Charles Millicent and Rawleigh Ufford were playing than either of them; for I saw—not in the muscles of his face, but in the changing light of his crafty eyes—that he fully compre-

hended the nature of the blunder of the one and the vexation of the other.

“Thank you, Watson,” said Mr. Ufford to his servant, when the latter put before him his coffee and other materials for making a good breakfast,—“and now look after that poor little girl there. Give her a good hearty meal; I dare say it is a long time since she has had one.—What? you haven’t a cup? then give her my saucer. Don’t keep her waiting: she is as hungry as I am, and, what is more, my guest, and I will not break bread before she does.”

I was still in the same place and attitude as I was in when Mr. Ufford sketched me, and Stephen Watson had to make several paces to-and-fro to bring me my breakfast from his culinary stores. His task, it was easy for me to detect, was ungrateful to him, for he moved slowly to me, and regarded me with dogged ill-humour as he waited on me. A large alloy

of the tyrant must have been lurking in my disposition, for I enjoyed being waited on by a great grown-up servant for the first time in my life ; and my satisfaction was increased, instead of diminished, by the evident reluctance with which the services were rendered.

“ You eat enough,” Stephen Watson growled out, taking an opportunity to insult me, when his master was too much engaged with his breakfast to observe our proceedings.

“ I do—I am hungry.”

“ What’s your name ? ”

“ What’s that to you ? ”

“ You little insolent beggar, is that the way you behave when a gentleman is so good as to feed you ? ”

“ You don’t feed me ; you wouldn’t give me a crust if you could help it.”

“ That I wouldn’t.”

“ But then you’re only a servant.”

“ Anyhow, you sha’n’t have any more.”

“If you don’t give me some more, I’ll tell Mr. Ufford.”

“What! picked up his name already?”

“Yes, and I shall pick some other things up before I have done with you.”

The man’s astonishment at my behaviour was great. He could not refrain from expressions of surprise; but I saw that he respected me, lean and covered with rags though I was, for making such a resolute stand against his oppression.

“Hang me, but I can’t blame you. If you were a lord’s child, they would make a fuss about you; but as you are only a poor, wandering brat, every servant like me thinks he may put his foot on you.”

The man was called away by the gentlemen, but before he left me he apportioned me a fresh supply of provision.

When the breakfast had come to a conclusion, Mr. Ufford said in a clear voice that was audible for yards round:—

“Watson, I want your opinion. If an enemy took possession of you, and carried you off, and, having thrown you into a dungeon, kept you there in chains, what would you do?”

“Try and get out, sir,” replied Watson with a comical grin.

“Suppose that, after racking your brains in every way to find a means of escape, you were brought to the horrible conclusion that you had no prospect of ever recovering your liberty, but must, till your dying day, lie on the straw of your loathsome dungeon, counting the slow moments, and goaded in your heart by the wrong your enemy had done you. Tell me, what thought would most frequently come into your head? What hope would you console yourself with, as your body became weaker, your mind feebler and more confused, but your sense of misery and injury more acute?”

Watson's eyes shot out flashes of fire; the

muscles of his pale face were as fitful in their action and as ghastly to look on as the movements of a galvanised corpse, and he clenched his fist in the exasperation he felt at the bare imagination of being subjected to such treatment.

“Sir,” said he slowly and harshly, “I would crouch down at the door of my dungeon, and hope that one day my tyrant might be led to come and visit me, to gloat over my brutal condition, and that when he came I should have strength enough and liberty enough to spring up at him, to close round him, to clutch his throat in my hands, and strangle him. I would not ask to live longer, I would not ask to recover my freedom, if only we might die together.”

“Good!” observed Mr. Ufford, slowly, and as if he was called on to criticise a theatrical performance. “You have feeling, Watson, and imagination, and considerable power; your

face is livid with rage. Prisoner at the bar, you are acquitted. Watson, pack up the things in the cart, and be off to the hall. I shall be home at dinner. Here are the keepers."

As he said "Prisoner at the bar, you are acquitted," I observed that Mr. Ufford exchanged glances with Mr. Millicent, and I then knew they had been discussing my story while I was at my breakfast.

I looked round, and saw slowly ascending the hill two keepers, with guns in their hands, bags slung over their shoulders, and a brace of sleek, clean pointers meekly following at their heels. On this addition to our party approaching within a few paces, Stephen Watson accelerated his movements, packed up the breakfast-things in a twinkling, and having received a few more orders from his master, disappeared down the sloping meadow with his horse and cart.

“Wait here, I shall be back in an instant,” observed Rawleigh Ufford to the keepers and his friend, Mr. Millicent, and, beckoning me to follow him, he strode along the hedgerow, turned to the left, and then walked, perhaps a hundred yards, further up the ascent.

With my eyes fixed on him, I pursued him, and when he stopped I was close upon him, with all my powers of vision concentrated on his handsome face, form, and limbs. He turned to me and looked at me, smiling at the same time a smile that said with the irresistible force of manly greatness—“look at me, little maiden; you may well enjoy the sight, for never before have your eyes rested on such a lovely object; and, know it, I am lord of you for ever!”

And I obeyed that imperious smile; and as I feasted my eyes with his royal comeliness, I saw the prospect behind him widen, and the ground beneath him, as it were, fall away, and

a vast interminable field of azure glory, sparkle, and dance with white-foamed, creamy wavelets between him and the horizon which was lost to sight in a still, tranquil field of brilliance.

Something of surprise and delight in my countenance, as the fresher breeze blew round me from this novel prospect, struck my master, and he said in his grandest way :—

“ What ! have you never seen this before ? ”

“ What is it, sir ? ”

“ It is the sea—the wide, wide sea. You have heard of it ? ”

“ I did not know it was like this ; I did not know it made one feel like this to look at it ; no one ever told me that it would make me so giddy, and strange, and happy to see it. But where are the ships ? Father used to tell me that men went down to the sea in ships, and did their business on great waters.”

“ Yonder, little girl !—far out—where the water is brightest, you may see some. The

little spots on the water, those little specks which are now black, and now bright white, as the sun chances to strike them, are ships—and each one of them contains a great many men.”

“How small the men must be!”

“No—they are as great as I am.”

“What, sir, and are then great men so very small?”

“It seems so. We find it out, little woman, when we get at a distance from them, and some few are clever enough to see it without the help of distance.”

And as he slowly uttered these words his face became more thoughtful, and I felt sure there was such a merciful greatness in his soul that it was impossible for him to hurt any living thing that was weaker than himself.

“But I may not waste my time here. The important task of killing small birds, imposed by a tyrannical public opinion on

members of the aristocracy, must be attended to.—Now, child, give me your hand, and let me lead you down the cliff to the beach.”

I put out my grimed hand, and he took it, not with disdain, or a cold pity, or an affectation of equality—but with a respectful movement of his body, as if, without knowing it, he was compelled to express his gratitude for my so confiding in him. And even as you then, with courtly homage, acknowledged the dignity of humanity in the person of a poor beggar-child, so, in after life, Rawleigh Ufford,—not to me alone, but to all who looked to your strong hand for help,—did you offer that respect which is to the poor more precious than any alms!

“Now,” said he, when he had conducted me down the rugged cleft which the storms of the heaven, and the beating of the ocean, and the rain-torrents descending from the

drenched uplands, had worked in the cliff, “mind me, you’re at present in considerable danger. But I’ll do all I can to help you. Before twenty-four hours are over I’ll know all about the Muscuts, and what it is best to do for protecting you from any charge of murder. But I can’t take you avowedly, just at this crisis, under my wing ; unless there is occasion for it.—This is what you must do. Start off that way, and walk along under the cliff, making the ocean your guide, and by nightfall you will come to Aldeburgh—a little seaport town. Here is your dinner, and here are a few shillings. When you come to Aldeburgh, ask your way to the George Inn, and when you get there, beg to see the landlady. Perhaps you’ll have a little difficulty in getting access to her, but if you tell the servants you *must* see her, they’ll take you to her. She is a good, kind lady. As soon as you are alone with her, show her this card, and say, ‘The

Earl's nephew gave me this card, and told me to show it to you, and beg you to keep me quiet, and secret, and unquestioned, till you hear more from him.' She knows who I am, and will be glad to oblige me.—Moreover, if you see anyone on the beach, as you walk along, avoid them, unless it be to ask for your comfort how many miles it is along the shore to Aldeburgh; but if anyone molests you, and you are not allowed to proceed quietly on your way, show my card and say, 'The Earl's nephew has sent me on an errand to Aldeburgh; and he'll make any man repent it who wrongs me.'—Will you obey me, little woman?"

"I will, sir."

"What! if I order you to drown yourself in the sea?"

"I will, sir."

"If I tell you to give yourself up to the law, and get hanged for murder?"

“I will, sir.”

“You’re a strange child—we must know more of each other. We must see each other a great deal.”

“Oh, sir, I hope we shall,” I said earnestly.

“Well!—and what are you thinking of now?”

I did not know I answered this question ;—but long afterwards—years afterwards—he told me that, my eyes meanwhile burning with an almost unearthly expression of mental anguish and of love for him, I made reply in a voice such as he had never heard proceed before from human lips, “Don’t ask?—it can’t be—the damage cannot be undone—oh, sir, if I had but known you before! if I had but known you from the time I was born.”

I was not aware that I said this; I fancied I made no answer at all; the sum of what I

remembered of those moments of my existence was—that the eyes of Rawleigh Ufford became full of tears, as they gazed at me with unspeakable tenderness, that he turned from me slowly, and slowly moved out of my sight, and that I sat down under the cliff, on a small clump of wave-worn crag, and cried bitterly, as I thought how different I might have been had I known that noble gentleman from my birth, living under his rule and obeying him in all things.

CHAPTER IX.

ALDEBURGH.

OLD as I was for my years, I was still young enough to rise against the weight of my pressing grief, and throw it from me. I soon ceased weeping, rose from my rest on the clump of crag, and proceeded on my way to Aldeburgh. At first I kept under the shadow of the high cliffs, and contented myself with admiring the contrasts of the dull grey, red, and dusky purple and yellow strata of which they

were composed ; and I debated why they were not all made of one colour. Growing bolder and more curious, I emerged from the beating brows of the main-land, and striking across a wide bed and two billowy ridges of large stones, I came upon the smaller pebbles of the beach, through which the receding tide was perpetually seeking its backward way, with long, lazy, drowsy, sociable whispers. Solace and hope, and treasures of learning, were in this melody of murmurs, at the same time soothing and harsh, voluptuous and inspiring ; and as I listened, a conviction seized me that there were powers in the universe capable of changing sterner and stronger things than the life of a frail infant like myself. And if they did not effect that change, why, still *they* were great and everlasting,—and, lost in the vague contemplation of that which I could only guess at, I forgot my own miserable little existence.

Soon something of childishness possessed me. I became pleased and charmed with the novel objects which littered the wet shingle. I marked the downy flakes of foam, now long as snakes in their serpentine windings, and now minute and delicate as feathers, that fringed the sleepy surge, and creamed along the lips of the shore. I picked up seaweeds, some broad and shining like riband, and some of fine and intricate network, star-fishes, stones that shone, whilst they were wet, as if they must be precious, and shells innumerable. The poor children of this generation are taught to classify all these strange objects, and call them ugly names, which I don't know how to spell, and therefore shall not write down. I wonder if such highly-favoured children see more beauty, or find more joy in the wonders of the ocean, and all its fantastic waifs and strays, than I did on first beholding them in utter ignorance of their nomenclature. If they

do, then—kind heaven! make me a charity-child in a coast-town, and give me the “Little Child’s Vade Mecum to the Marvels of Science,” written by the muscular clergyman whose habit it is to publish scientific treatises in the shape of novels, and novels like scientific treatises, mixing his intellectual pleasures, as I have heard idle young men say they like to treat their hot beverages.

I met few people on the shore. I passed a small fishing-village, about an hour after the commencement of my journey, when a few burly sailors, watched by their wives and children, were putting off to sea in a boat, on a fishing excursion; and I thought—why, I know not—on the miraculous draught of fishes, of which, in the almost forgotten calm of years before, I had read in the New Testament. A mile or more further on, I fell in with a party of beautiful and well-dressed children, taking the benefit of the sea-breezes under the

protection of their nurses. The children came round me, looking at me with mute curiosity and an air of fearful speculation; and I liked them, partly on account of their beauty, and partly because they were *young ladies and gentlemen*; but I entertained no amiable feelings to the nursemaids, for they angrily warned their charges that if they kept *looking* at me, I should make them as dirty as I was myself. This sarcasm hurt me very much; and in my vexation I forgot all about the wonders of the sea-shore, and was unable to recover my philosophic composure until darkness fell upon the earth, and I, weary and alarmed, was still toiling on with much labour, and many stumblings under the cliffs.

I had eaten the dinner Mr. Rawleigh Ufford had given me, and I was again hungry; but I had nothing with which to stay my craving for food, except the three shillings he had given

me, and it was clearly impossible to eat the shillings without the convenient aid of commerce. I was debating how, when, and where I could buy food, when I came upon a second small fishing-village, composed of a few huts, illuminated by half-a-dozen rush candles that shone out brilliantly on the black day-close. Entering one of these habitations, I asked a clumsy lad, its only occupant, firstly, how far it was to Aldeburgh, and was told two miles; I asked the lad, secondly, that he would sell me some bread. He requested me to show him my money; on which I unguardedly displayed my three shillings.

“Whar are you?” said he.

“A girl,” was my not inappropriate answer.

“Where do you live?”

“Nowhere.”

“Who’s your father?”

“I have not got a father—or mother either.”

“Where’s your relations?”

“Haven’t got no relations.”

“How did you come here?”

“A gentleman down far ayont has sent me on an errand to Aldeburgh, and I am afraid I shan’t get there in time to-night.”

“Oh, you’ll get there fast enough,” observed my interlocutor, seizing my hand, and twisting the money out of it with a dexterity a Scotch banker would have admired. In another instant I was hustled out of the cottage, and had the door slammed against my expostulations.

I reflected on this incident with feelings not more amiable than those which animated the gentle breast of Oliver Goldsmith, when “the rude Carinthian boor” declined to gratuitously supply “the houseless stranger” with bed and supper. But, as I was of a philosophic turn of mind, it helped me to the discovery of a great law, governing the affairs of men.

The man who had forcibly taken my money was dressed in the garb of poverty, and wore a fustian coat ; Joel Haggart, though he was generally reputed to be rich, usually wore a fustian coat ; Daniel Muscut did the same. My three great enemies had all worn fustian. I resolved never again to trust a man so appareled. And, I am proud to say, I have ever acted up to this resolution ; though possibly an enlarged acquaintance with the world has induced me to extend its application to the wearers of other fabrics.

My bones began to ache ; and my head was affected with dizziness ; and I felt going mad from being compelled to look mentally on a multitude of objects at the same time—children, nursemaids, fishermen, pointer-dogs, starfishes, poachers, shells, gentlemen, murdered women, ink-bottles, fustian-coats, shillings, coffee-cups, Watsons, Joel Haggarts, Muscuts—but on I went, and in the right direction.

I passed a martello-tower built for crushing the uncle of our dear ally, the Emperor of the French ; I passed a battery raised for the same un-Christian purpose ; I diverged, without knowing I did so, from the beach, traversed a bit of arid waste land whereon the Aldeburgh donkeys supported existence with sand and vegetable filaments—and then, all of a sudden, without any preparation for so successful a close to my day's march—I found myself in the principal street of Aldeburgh, a snug little town, remarkable, as I first entered it, for straggling houses, cold blustering winds, a strong smell of tar, and a total absence of street-lamps.

Another trouble fell on me now. I was under the delusion that Mr. Ufford had told me to go to the “Queen's Head,” whereas, “The George” was the name of the tavern to which he had directed me ; and in begging the few wayfarers I encountered, to inform me of

the locality of the "Queen's Head," I got into considerable difficulty, for, strange to say, the Queen had no head in the town. The people, instead of commiserating me for labouring under so perplexing a mistake, were very angry with me for my misfortune; and one gentleman whom I had the boldness to accost, and who, as I afterwards learnt, was the mayor and principal merchant of the borough, declared with several oaths, that I was an impertinent little brat, and ought to be sent to the work-house or prison.

I was beginning to think that perhaps it would be better to give up my search for the appointed hostel, and content myself with resting one more night in the open air, when I wandered out of the main street, round the corner of what seemed to me a very magnificent red-brick house, and sauntered down a yard leading to some stables. There was life going on in the yard; stables with doors open,

through which I saw lanterns burning hospitably, and men bedding up or rubbing down horses with much hissing and many snatches of ballad-singing ; and two house-dogs chained to kennels placed on opposite sides of the yard, each dog barking furiously at the other, and growling for a bone which neither could get. I crept up this yard, and at the top, where it narrowed, I found myself in a blaze of light from windows that opened on either side of a small paved court. On my right were two windows and a half-opened door, which belonged to what I lived to know was a billiard-room ; and on my left was one large window through which I discerned all the appointments of a cosy tap-room—rows of picturesque spirit-bottles, a highly-polished mahogany counter with brass fittings, a glorious fire, two snug arm-chairs, and a fine black cat which accorded well with the warm carpet on which it laid. There were two persons also in

this tap-room ; a happy, smiling, buxom lady, with a cap on her head, and a greater weight of honest fat than carking care on her shoulders. Talking to this dame was another person, of the same sex, whom I loved at first sight—and loved ever afterwards. She was a young lady, at the most not more than one or two-and-twenty years old, of a slight, delicate figure, which the winter walking-dress in which she was habited did not prevent me from seeing was elegant. She had on her head a bonnet of black beaver, on which was fitted a dark veil, that was drawn up and gathered in folds round the front of her head-dress, so as just to leave visible to me a face of very remarkable attractions. It was not a particularly small face, but the delicacy of its features gave it the effect of a size less than common ; its complexion was fair and transparent ; its lips were made to laugh, chatter, kiss, beseech—indeed to do anything except

pout; but in its blue eyes lay its leading charm—God had put in them the light of simplicity, trustfulness, fervour, spiritual firmness, mental strength. Tell me, everlasting warden of mysteries, why God sends a few such angels, *and only such a very few*, to such a world as this! Is it to remind us of what we have lost? or of what we may win? Heaven grant it may not be the latter! for I would have none bid the game farewell rejoicing, when it is my fate to leave the tables bankrupt.

I took my eyes from the tap-parlour, with its warm welcome of bright lights and pleasant inmates, and proceeded to inspect the billiard-room and its occupants. The ivory balls were rattling over the green cloth, under the guidance of two young men, articled clerks to the principal attorney of Aldeburgh, who were playing a match in the presence of their bosom-associates, the two pupils of the leading surgeon of the town and an old gen-

tleman who sat in a chair drinking brandy-and-water very fast.

This veteran, at the first glance, attracted my attention. He was the wreck of a magnificent man, of a noble presence, and Herculean proportions. In his haggard, deeply-lined face, prominent brows, vulture nose, and white locks, there were properties any art-student would pay liberally for in a model; but the dull gaze of senility was in his eyes, and "drunkard" was branded on his palsied lips, which were covered with a stumpy growth of hair. He leaned forward in his seat, his right hand continually raising a large tumbler from the table to his lips, and his left clutching, and resting on, an enormous bludgeon of black-thorn.

One of the medical pupils kept the score for the players; the other, with a cigar in his mouth, conversed in a deferential manner with the old man.

“A good game, sir?” observed the student.

“Ay—Higgins will get it,” responded the veteran, taking another pull at his brandy-and-water.

“No, sir, he can’t. See, Smith has made another cannon; and, by Jove, there’s another.”

“Pooh!” exclaimed the old man angrily, thumping his stick on the ground, “fluke, only a fluke. Higgins will have it.”

“What will you bet, sir?”

“Two to one—in—in sixpences.”

“Done, sir.”

“Done.”

A few more strokes and flukes were made by the fortunate Smith; and speedily the game was decided *in his favour*, and *against* the old man, who fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a few seconds, and eventually took from it a sixpence—evidently his last. Then he deliberately felt in all the other pockets of

his dress, and succeeded in rummaging out of them four pence, and as many half-pence.

“There’s your money—a shilling,” he remarked, tendering, as he spoke, this collection of the realm’s current coin in payment of his debt.

“Oh, pray, sir, don’t do that—don’t inconvenience yourself, if you please, sir—I had rather not take the money—it’s nothing to me—and what’s more, I don’t really deserve the bet, for, you see, I saw how the game was going, and you didn’t,” blundered out the lad, who was too much of a gentleman to relish accepting the poor old ruffian’s last pence, and at the same time not gentleman enough to know that he ought to take them without any words.

“What! you jackanapes—you dirty apprentice to a cheating druggist! you dare to refuse my money!” exclaimed the old man, dashing on the floor his empty glass, and run-

ning towards the offending student, with the blackthorn cudgel sweeping right and left in a most perilous style.

With a duck of his head, a dodge, and a hasty run backwards, the menaced apprentice escaped his adversary, who was immediately seized by the other three young men present.

"Really, sir, you are mistaken," they all three exclaimed, at the same time; "Tomlinson did not mean to insult you. All he meant was that perhaps you would rather settle the little bet to-morrow. We all know you too well to think you would shirk a debt of honour."

"Exactly, sir," exclaimed Tomlinson, clutching at this means of pacification; "I know there is often a good deal of irregularity about your rents coming in, and I thought that till you had seen your solicitor, I—that is you—"

"You lie," roared the old man, struggling

to free himself from his three detainers, and emitting a volley of exclamations, which, as I am a lady, I may not write down. “You mean to insult me, because I happen to be a little out at elbows. But I’ll let you know who I am. I am a peer’s son; I may be a peer myself one day—not an earl (I have never married a —) but a viscount; and I hunted the county hounds for forty years, and my name stood high at Newmarket, and no man played with better fellows at Crockford’s—by heavens, I’ll let you know who I am. I’ll shoot you dead, slap through your skull, as I did Lord Tilbury, who called me a—a—swindler. You dog, I’ll be equal with you.”

The uproar in the billiard-room became so great that I was terrified, and shrinking back from the doorway I retired into a dark angle of the court. As I did so, the stout buxom lady (landlady she turned out to be) passed quickly from the passage, into which the

parlour-bar opened, crossed the yard without noticing me, and entered the noisy apartment, closing the door behind her. Her influence speedily restored quiet; and in less than three minutes she recrossed the yard (having however again closed the billiard-room door), and re-entered her parlour. I followed her unobserved up the passage, and both saw and heard what passed between her and her guest, the beautiful young lady.

“There, there, Miss Ufford, dry your eyes, there’s nothing to fear or cry about. Your pa’ was not exactly quarrelling; indeed, I may say he was not at all quarrelling. ‘The fact is, miss, he was a little merry, and is in one of his funny humours, and took it into his head to act a part, you see, miss, in a kind of tragedy way, just to amuse the other gentlemen. But I told him that I hoped he’d be gracious enough not to make quite so much noise, and, like the gentleman that he always is when his

enemies leave him alone, he fell off instantlerly —into the quietness of a mouse.”

The young lady smiled at this, but the tears were still bright in her eyes, as she looked into the benevolent face of her companion, and enquired :—

“ Don’t you think, kind Mrs. Cookesley, you could get him to come away with me now? If you whispered to him that his tea is ready for him, and that I shall be very lonely all the evening if he does not come to me, don’t you think you could lead him away ? ”

“ What a beseeching way you have with you, Miss Ufford ! I could not say you straight ‘ no,’ if you asked me to burn the house down the night before the corporation dinner. But it isn’t no good trying to bring the honest gentleman off yet. You may trust to me for having him home as soon as possible. And asking your pardon for taking such a liberty with a gentleman who is the Earl’s

brother, and an honourable hisself, let alone his being your pa', Miss Ufford, which is more to me than any other consideration; but, knowing that he was rather fanciful about not stirring till a certain hour, I managed just now, unbeseen, to put on the clock a couple of turns."

"It's very good of you, Mrs. Cookesley, to help me so," returned the young lady.

"Lord, Miss Caroline, don't call it *good*, it's only *duty*. Wasn't I for five-and-twenty years your grandma's housekeeper? And didn't my lady and all the family always treat me kind, and always seem to remember that as a girl I had married a ten-horse farmer, and didn't look to servitude as the walk of life into which it should ever please God to call me? So, dear Miss Ufford, do you now go home, and you may rely on my walking at the proper time with your pa' to his door, and taking as much care of him

through the dark streets as if he was the reputation of the 'George Inn,' hotel, tavern, and posting-house, and the best wines at moderate prices."

"I wish I had a cat like yours, Mrs. Cookesley," observed Miss Ufford, changing the subject; "I want a companion sometimes, and your cat would be a first-rate friend and counsellor."

"Lor, Miss Ufford, you'd find him very dull. You'd soon want something more human."

"Oh! of course I would rather have something a little more like myself. I often think I should like to adopt a poor child, and bring it up, and assist it to become a good woman."

"What a strange notion, Miss Ufford."

"Perhaps it is so. But it is what I would do if I had a little money. And sometimes I think, that as it is, I might contrive to accomplish it. You see, the child's food and

clothing would not cost much ; and I shouldn't educate her as a lady, but as a lady's-maid. Till she was able to be my maid, and keep my little house neat, I could manage with an hour's help a-day from some poor woman. Now, is not this a pretty scheme ? ”

“ Here's an opening in life ? why shouldn't the pretty young lady adopt me ? I wouldn't murder her,” thought I ; and boldly tapping at the door, I entered the parlour, and presented myself to Mrs. Cookesley and Miss Caroline Ufford.

“ No, no, child, it's no use begging here. Go home to your mother,” said the former.

“ I am not altogether a beggar, ma'am,” I responded, meekly, “ but I am sent here by a gentleman. This is “ The George Inn ? ”

“ Yes—and I am the mistress of it.”

“ Then, ma'am, I have to show you this, and ask you to take care of me till you hear more from him.”

So saying, I held out the card which had been given to me in the morning. Mrs. Cookesley read it, and made a few hasty exclamations of unmitigated astonishment.

“Why, Lord bless me, Miss Caroline, this is Mr. Rawleigh’s card!”

“What! cousin Rawleigh’s?”

“Ay, dear, the same.”

“Then the child is for me to take care of, and not for you,” exclaimed Miss Ufford, with a flushed face.

“My dear miss,— this one wont suit you.

“Why not?”

“It’s so dirty, miss.”

“You shall have her washed.”

“It’s so ragged, miss.”

“I’ll clothe her.”

“It’s so lean, miss.”

“I’ll fatten her.”

“She’s too tall, miss,— in two years she’ll be a woman.”

“ All the better. She'll all the sooner be fit to be my maid.”

So far, so good. On entering the room, I had made up my mind to quarter myself on the one or the other of the benevolent women. The numbness, exhaustion, and giddiness, consequent on the hardship and toil I had recently undergone, had suggested to me the probability that I should soon faint away, and the apprehension that such an accident might befall me, put it into my mind that such a catastrophe might be a very good way of compelling them to act charitably to me, if they discredited the card and suspected me of trying to impose upon them. I had therefore, in a few rapid seconds of thought, resolved on feigning a fit of unconsciousness if they manifested any inclination to reject my appeal. It did not however take long to show me that such hypocrisy would not be required ; but just as I had arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, I dropt

naturally into the condition that I was prepared to simulate ; the heat of the parlour, instead of reviving, seemed to choke me ; the lights and objects in the room whirled around me ; there were at least twenty, instead of two, merciful women looking upon me with pitiful eyes ; and, throwing my arms upwards in a paroxysm of alarm, and exclaiming, “ I am not pretending—indeed, I am not pretending,” I fell fainting into Miss Ufford’s arms.

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